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A DISCIPLE of PLATO

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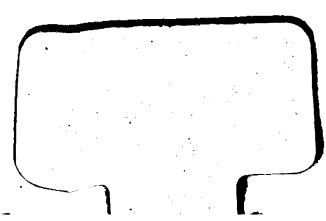

A DISCIPLE OF PLATO

" He ended ; and his words, replete with guile,
Into her heart too easy entrance won."

— PARADISE LOST.

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A DISCIPLE OF PLATO

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JOHN WARD DUNSMORE

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

JOSEPH PIERREPONT: A rich American, married to a young Frenchwoman of beauty and position.

CÉLESTE: otherwise Madame Pierrepont, wife of Joseph Pierrepont.

MADAME DE FLOUEST: Mother of Céleste, and a typical French mother.

THÉRÈSE: Maid to Madame Pierrepont.

KATHERINE AND ROSE LANGDON: American women. Cousins to Joseph Pierrepont.

MR. AND MRS. LANGDON: Aunt and Uncle and Guardians to the Misses Langdon, and people of wealth and decided social position. Residents of New York.

JACK LIVINGSTON: "Fiancé" to Rose Langdon.

HANNAH BROOKS: For thirty years companion and maid to the ladies of the Langdon family.

HENRI DE THYSBAERT: Of the French nobility. A man about town, and a great beau in Paris society, and, with de Rito and others, a warm admirer of Madame Pierrepont.

MONSIEUR DE GIRON: A rich old Frenchman, suitor for the hand of Rose Langdon.

MARIE: A poor French girl, deceived by de Thysbaert.

HENRI: Their little child.

Maids, men-servants, etc.

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Into her heart too easy entrance won'" . . *Frontispiece*

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A Disciple of Plato

CHAPTER I

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at its flood, leads on to fortune."

SHAKESPEARE.

"There is a tide in the affairs of Woman,
Which, taken at its flood, leads — God knows where."

BYRON.

THE cold is intense outside! The thermometer down at the Arch de Triomphe points to five degrees above zero; but while this excessive cold reigns without, in Madame Pierrepont's *boudoir* the warmest, softest atmosphere prevails! Madame and Monsieur are *tête-à-tête* this morning, and, judging from Madame's lovely flushed face, and Monsieur's happy, contented one, there is no happier couple in all Paris than they. She has her dimpled arms around his neck, and her soft cheek pressed against his face. Warned finally by the lateness

of the hour, and an engagement that must be kept, he reluctantly prepares to take leave of his young wife, returning to take repeated adieus, carrying away with him the image of her beautiful self, sitting in the arm-chair in her light draperies, and her wealth of glorious hair hanging over her shoulders. Looking at her, she seems a saint to him, and his belief in a God grows strong. She sits still for some minutes after he has left her, a smile playing around her beautiful, faultlessly carved lips.

"Does Madame wish her bath?" asks the low, discreet voice of Madame Pierrepont's maid, who waits her mistress's reply.

"Is that you, Thérèse?" says Madame, with more animation than is consistent with her recumbent attitude. "Yes, I am ready. I thought that he would never go! Get me into a black gown; I want to go out as quickly as I can. Bah! what a fool he is! That is MAN for you! Ah, me! Such a mistake! Such a mistake! The absurdity of such an experiment! Mamma and I even had the decency to tell him so, but, no, nothing would avail. He decided that I was an angel, and angel I

had to be. He is such an honest, stupid, guileless soul. I feel almost sorry for him, and might generously disenchant him, but you see, Thérèse, he is so rich, so rich! Such a strong argument against any such Quixotic, disinterested proceedings on my part; and now how stupid, how incomparably stupid he is proving to be! A second Othello, with all the subsequent idiocy. Poor Maurice has to watch like a dog! Bah! I am getting tired of it all. These foreigners, these Americans especially, with their insular notions! Why can't he console himself? There are *so* many pretty women. We have been married six months. Surely, in Heaven's name, does he expect me to keep up the simpering rôle of Juliet forever? His devotion is becoming sickening. That is the way with Americans, — all or nothing, — but why can't people understand that satiety comes to Woman's temperament as quickly as to Man's? Dress me, Thérèse, and do so quickly, for I could work myself into a rage over his stupidity!"

The Pierreponts are well known socially here in Paris, both in the American Colony

and in the more conservative Faubourg St. Germain, owing to the fact of Madame's great beauty, and Joseph Pierrepont's vast wealth and descent from an old Knickerbocker family of undisputed prominence and position. Pierrepont has spent most of his life in Europe. A man past his first youth, a thorough man of the world, with the few illusions that this leaves one. Constitutionally healthy, and, therefore, an optimist by nature. A man popular among men, and, because of his money, courted by all kinds of women. As a rule, he was unerring in his judgment, but generous to a fault.

His wife? Well, he saw her first driving in the Champs Élysées under the Argus eyes of her mother. Céleste, well born, just out of a convent, with all the virginal purity and simplicity that it behooved a French maiden to display when taking her first peep at this wicked Babylonical world. Very fair and innocent she looked, nestling back in her white furs, the brisk outdoor air color playing havoc in her cheeks, and making still brighter her sparkling black eyes. Life seemed such a jest to her! At the time the man, who is now her

husband, first saw her, the young lady was fervently thanking God in her not over-pious little heart that the isolation and boredom of convent life were over, to give place to a long, continuous, joyous life that should be one of wild intoxication and gratification of desire. Little of the unsophistication of the *débutante* was discernible, when, on her arrival, the first thing she said to her mother was, "Now, Mother, hasten to find me a husband, that I may in reality begin to enjoy life!" Her mother, with the characteristic fervor of a French mother, began taking a mental inventory of all the eligible men in Paris. They both were cogitating and planning to make an alliance destined and actuated by no higher motive than to be a stepping-stone towards greater freedom and license for the girl, who, now as a girl, Mrs. Grundy decreed should lead a life not only of anchorite coldness, but, as Caesar's wife, "above suspicion," and who, after marriage, would be oblivious to all deviation of commands so rigidly enforced during youth's celibacy. Very beautiful in all womanly beauty was Céleste! Consequently was it

to be wondered that, conscious of this fact, and with the blood of youth in her veins, — French youth, too, forsooth, — the girl should ardently wish for the time to come when all these beauties of form and face should meet with their just appreciation?

And she! Oh, she would be free as air! With marriage, in her land, came freedom, not bondage. Her husband theoretically must of necessity be a man with sufficient affluence to grant all corporal desires. Further than this she gave him no serious thought. He was merely the basis, the necessary basis, on which to build the pleasurable success of a married life. What admirers she would have! Lovers with melting, fiery eyes! Lovers with tremulous blue ones! Other women's lovers! All conceivable sorts of lovers!

While these pleasant reveries were busy in the young lady's charming brain, the man in the question, then *beau garçon* living in chambers, sometimes alone and sometimes not alone, as his inclination varied, was suddenly noticed by his friends to be in a constant state of meditation, frequenting the tables less and less,

and was even known to let an English lord cut him out with Dolly Highkicker, who had been spending his money for years, and who had been hitherto looked upon as his exclusive property. A great change had suddenly unquestionably been wrought in him. An undefined longing (the same old story of Man) arose within him for a better, nobler life. A sort of loathing and contempt for that which before had satisfied him now came to him.

He began studying the faces of the saints in the Louvre, comparing them to their disadvantage with this beautiful, *spirituelle* face that had as suddenly appeared and as suddenly pierced through this outer wall of indifference and skepticism, proverbial with him hitherto. He had rather avoided women, except those whose caprices and whims he could encourage as long as they amused him, and discard when they failed to do so. With Balzac he believed — though perhaps he was too decent a fellow to express it audibly — that "mistresses were not like wine, and did *not* improve with time." Eros may have been out of employment, or the Devil concluded that this man too long

had enjoyed the unadulterated sweetness of life without any of its bitterness, and that conjugality was needed to remind him that, after all, Heaven is not found on earth. Be it what it was, the man's creed had been firmly Byronical, — that perhaps while for a woman marriage might be safety, for a man it was certainly folly. He had come to Europe determining to extract from life all she owed him; to play, if it pleased him, the rôle of a Don Juan, or, on the contrary, a Joseph; in other words, to live as the actuations of mind or passions dictated. Yet, the glance from a woman's black eyes, a momentary blush, and the stoical indifference of years was swept away.

The thing was accomplished through the usual channels, with all due regard to consistency of French form. Pierrepont was allowed to come quite as often as he pleased to gaze on the beautiful face of his adored one, but Céleste's mother was omnipresent, and a taste of the amorous red lips could only be imagined, not realized. The French as a nation in such matters are unequalled in tact. Satiety and familiarity are not good propaga-

tors of marriages, whatever the World may say or think to the contrary.

Céleste behaved quite as behooved a modest young French girl. Very shy and sweet she looked, and no one could have imagined the plans and intricacies of thought working in that versatile brain of hers. When the alliance had been proposed it had carried no surprise to her. A less clever and unobserving woman than she, could not have failed to notice the perpetual presence and ardurous glances from the tall stranger who haunted their footsteps like a shadow. Go where they would, — to ball, concert, private house, or gallery, — they would be sure to encounter him, and when finally he formally applied for her hand Céleste felt quite relieved that it was over.

The night before the wedding ceremony the mother called her daughter to her and said: "Céleste, from this day you will be your own mistress. Take care not to abuse your freedom. Try to acquire sufficient tact to meet all emergencies. Seek your friends (I suppose you must have them) from among your husband's friends. The smaller the family you

have the better for you. Forbear to fall in love with your husband. Treat his lady friends with consideration, — treat them as you want him to treat your friends. Do not be too liberal with your favors. To Man, even to husbands, that which is easily acquired soon becomes charmless."

But all advice is superfluous to Céleste, so matured and developed are all her plans.

Pierrepont, with all the better, nobler man in him arisen, reverentially takes the little white hand so confidently laid in his; and it had been possible for some woman to keep from that day forth, so inspired was he, this zenith of reverence and respect. His past life seems like a sacrilege and blasphemy to him. A polluted, heinous existence, that, as he takes her to his arms with a husband's caress, seems more monstrous, more hideous in its viciousness, than ever before. Céleste is inspired by no such inflated sentiments. She had read Petrarch's Cervantes, and Byron's definitions of marriage, and had come to the conclusion that the pristine institution probably was the only one not variable. The first two or three weeks had

been Elysian, and Pierrepont was oblivious to all except his beautiful child wife. Even to Céleste the novelty was rather a pleasing diversion. So far, her keeper had shown no sign of his possible objectionable traits. Then they had come back to Paris, — dear, delightful Paris! — where time is forgotten, boredom impossible, and conscience ofttimes obsolete! Weeks have passed, weeks prolific of unalloyed pleasure. Paris metaphorically had bowed at Céleste's shrine. Her toilets, her form, and her *chic*, were the theme of all Paris. Céleste congratulates herself, and fervently blesses the will that had caused her mother to drive her each day down the *Champs Élysées.*

The first to discover and covet Céleste's abnormal attractiveness was one Monsieur Durand, the "man who shot Count Lisco, who was foolish enough, in these modern days, to expect to have a monopoly of his wife's affections." Pleased, and quite ready to begin her career, Céleste manages with Machiavellian tact this first affair. She was not quite sure of the idiosyncrasies of disposition her liege-lord might possess, and so cleverly was it managed,

that even after all the world was cognizant of it, Pierrepont remained blissfully unconscious of it; clasping his rival's hand, even, as he came from a *tête-à-tête* with Madame. Nor was Joseph Pierrepont a fool, — only an American. As a Frenchman once said to me, "You speak, sir, of the chastity of the American women; methinks there may not be such a predominance of chastity as obtusity of their men."

Following Durand in Céleste's favor, had come Henri de Thysbaert of the *Chasseurs*, with his glorious eyes, and having in his possession compromising letters from half the women in Paris. His conquest of Céleste was not so quick, but a most assured one. Remembering her mother's advice, it was a siege of some weeks before a smile, a coveted glance, assured him of his triumph. He had been very good friends with Pierrepont in the old days; still that was no reason to him that he should have any scruples about making love to his friend's wife. Whether wrong or right his ardor was most intense, and their mutual "friendship" daily becoming too marked for disguise. I wonder at Céleste too! but, so it is, — posses-

sion makes us careless. Events were thus pleasantly progressing when one of those friends whom happy, unsuspecting husbands sometimes possess, thought it his duty to play Iago to his too sanguine friend. We are not apt to be credulous of those things we do not want to believe, and the result of this disinterested warning was a severance of a friendship of years.

"Poor child!" he thought indignantly to himself. "Even she, with all her purity, cannot escape their venom and envy! Because she is kind to them all, they must in return cut and slash at her with their base innuendoes and lying insinuations." And Henri, although a little wild, verily no better fellow ever lived! Had she not been just as innocently kind to Durmand, Inglèces, and scores of others?

That evening, watching her in her simple white dress, with the baby blue ribbons fluttering about her, he feels more strongly than ever that this world is too vile, too polluted with sin and vice, for such as she. Nevertheless, because from experience he knows that accusation would eventually deprive the angels of their

sanctity, he decides that he will speak to her again. What a crying shame it was that he had to! To open her young mind to their poisoned, diabolical, false sophistry!

And yet, as I have said, Joseph Pierrepont was no fool. Some one has said "*Si le Diable était une femme, on n'aura pas des hommes à Ciel, pas même assez pour faire les anges.*" (If the Devil were a woman, there would not be enough men in Heaven even to make the angels.) What an unfair, capricious mistress Fate is! She pampers, indulges, blinds us, then suddenly, without provocation, changes, opens our eyes, and for smiles gives frowns, for caresses blows.

Retrospectively, this insinuation against his wife began to annoy Pierrepont considerably. He feels that, in justice to his wife, he must speak of it to her in some way. Then, with the greatest reluctance, the poor, honest devil begins his difficult task. After much introductory talk, in which Céleste in no way helps him, only staring at him with those great, innocent eyes of hers wide open, he succeeds in making a beginning; assures her of his loathing and

repugnance that HE, of all others, should be the one to open her young eyes to the base, sordid uncharitableness of a world steeped in suspicion and vice; quotes "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny," etc., etc.

Céleste is vastly amused, and has the greatest desire to laugh outright, but, innocently and with pained amazement, meets the confidence so touchingly reposed in her. The color comes and leaves Joseph Pierrepont's face as he goes on to tell her all they have dared say. With a sudden, half-hysterical little sob she rushes over to where he is standing, throws herself on his bosom, crying as genuinely as Viviane of old cried on the bosom of Merlin.

"But, oh, my darling, you did not believe it! You," reproachfully, "would not believe it! You, whose love, my husband, is life to me!"

Then she clings to him, her young soul looking through her eyes into his, and he suddenly feels his strength leaving him, and his arms slip from her shoulder to her waist. He draws her passionately to him, feel-

ing disgust and hatred for himself, love and holy reverence increased, if possible, for her.

When Thérèse joins Madame after Pierrepont's departure, the first thing Céleste ejaculates is, "What a beast he is!" and "*Grand Dieu*, what a fool!"

"Madame, Monsieur Henri is below. Monsieur Pierrepont will be at the Embassy for three hours. Will Madame see Monsieur Henri?" is the reply the maid makes.

"Yes! show him in here," says Céleste, "but wait! take my hair down and one slipper off! There; that will do. Good effect; eh, Thérèse?"

Until now, although all Paris would have scoffed at such an assertion, the affair had been purely Platonic, unless one discounts being to the contrary, prolonged hand clasps, and pure, chaste kisses. Unfortunately, in Céleste's mental plans no thought had been given to the possibility of her becoming enamoured herself. Like most women, she depended too much on her own strength, and the corresponding folly and weakness of man. Not that virtue itself was so desirable a thing

in her eyes. The descendant of a long line of French women, willing to sell themselves for position and gold, made this impossible with her. Had she married one of her own countrymen, much of this worry, disguise, and diplomacy might have been avoided. Frenchmen know what concessions they are expected to make, and what concessions they expect to have made them. That at which foreigners sneer, and choose to call characteristic lack of manliness, and cowardice, is in reality only common sense and national custom. But Céleste, alas! had married an American, a man impregnated with his own country's ideas of a wife's chastity, and she had attempted to play the rôle of the woman he blissfully, ignorantly believed himself to be the possessor of. It was a rôle wearisome in the extreme to her! Pierrepoint would smile a half pitying, half derisive smile, as he saw so clearly in others what he was so oblivious to in his own wife.

"Oh, she was perfect, past all parallel!"—and so she did seem to all outside formalities. She was certainly a beautiful woman, above medium height, with the soft, undulat-

ing, voluptuous movements one sometimes sees in French women, and always in women of the Orient. Her eyes were large and very dark, with that expression in them which always puzzles me when I see it in a woman — to tell whether it is the soul or the passions that are in the predominance. Her hair was black and glossy. She was very white — that whiteness of complexion through which men love to watch steal the sudden flush born of sudden emotion. Her lips were finely moulded, the under one perhaps a little sensual, but none the less beautiful on account of this. She dressed perfectly, with all the fascinating, puzzling constituencies of a woman's toilet that fill the grosser masculine mind with delight.

But "When maids and dames grow kinder, caution should increase!" If women *would* only remember that Woman's most omnipotent enemy *is* satiety. Be economical in the display of your probable charms. If you possess Aphroditean busts, take care that your vanity does not outstrip your prudence. Let their rise and fall be seen only through a thin

cascade of lace or the transparency of a *peignoir*. If your ankles outrival Hebe's, *please* do not show them so often that they become monotonously symmetrical. The power of Woman lies in her knowledge of just how much to grant, just how much to deny.

"Céleste!" said her mother to her one morning, "you are not half so clever a woman as I hoped to see you." Granted Pierrepont is a fool, as far as I can see he by no means has a monopoly of the rôle. You are behaving very idiotically. It will not do, my child, Love if you must, but keep to the conventional mode of doing so. I am getting too old to be worried in this way. Who is it now? still that stripling Henri? What signifies it if the other women do make fools of themselves over him! Bah! that mere lad to supersede Inglèces, who was a man. And, besides, the folly of it all! What do you want to become serious for and compromise yourself?"

"Compromise myself!" quotes Céleste, indignantly, who believes herself clever enough to deceive even her astute mother. With a pretty show of outraged pride and wifely

dignity she says: "How you talk! As though as virtuous and strong a woman as I could be tempted, let alone overcome by temptation! Do you believe, forsooth, that there is no such thing as friendship? Must a division of sex —"

"Céleste," interrupts her mother, dryly, "cease your histrionics. Do not be a fool, nor pay me the compliment of taking me for one. If you were not my child you would disgust me. Putting aside all platitudes, the actual fact is just this: Something must be found to interest Pierrepont, otherwise he may grow too observing. He is rather a peculiar make-up, — not so hard to manage as you think. Naturally, as long as the glamour and novelty of his marriage possess him, you are comparatively safe. The position that you occupy now is satisfactory; but this state of affairs, my child, will not, cannot last. If he ever should come to doubt you, I question whether our combined efforts could disperse it. Scandal and all sorts of unpleasantness would probably result. Something, child," earnestly, "must be thought of, and at once."

"Such an easy problem to solve, such a very easy thing to accomplish," answers her daughter, laughing merrily, and showing her faultless teeth.

"You should always smile," said her mother, irrelevantly, taking an approving inventory of her, and then continues: "Such a metamorphosis as we thought his marriage would cause! I suppose," in despair, "that I should never have allowed you to marry him, for I did, you know, foresee how it would be from the first."

"Oh, no," says Céleste, sarcastically, "I ought not to have married him. I ought to have refused all his money, and been a beggar for the rest of my existence."

"Oh, well, Céleste," said her mother, in genuine distress, "if he were only a Frenchman, he would then understand and accept situations as they are. I certainly will, if possible, keep you out of the divorce courts, although I foresee that I shall have my hands full."

"I wish we knew of some one," said Céleste, in no way moved by her mother's solicitude, —

"a thoroughly good woman," she continues argumentatively, — "I do not think a thoroughly good woman would know enough to fascinate a man of his type; *the others* are too old a story to him. The woman who might be made to answer," she says meditatively, "is one who has led an innocent, rigidly virtuous life, possessing physical attractions, and an intense but as yet undeveloped personality."

"Pshaw!" says her mother, impatiently; "where would you find such a woman, pray?"

"But I suppose there are such women," laughs her daughter.

"Doubtlessly," answers her mother; "but I hardly think you will be apt to meet them in Paris, or among your set. Such attributes are not long left unbought here."

"That, nevertheless, would be the kind of woman," replies her daughter, — "the only kind that would give me a chance of liberty."

"But where in the world can such a woman be found?" asks her mother. "Hark! some one is knocking at the door. Who is it?"

"'Speak of the Devil!'" whispers Céleste, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Ah, you, my

darling!" joyously, running to meet her husband as he puts his head in the door.

"What an unconventional young couple you are!" says mamma-in-law, graciously returning her son-in-law's salutation, "married as long as you have been and still no signs of being bored with one another, and neither of you at all ashamed of your infatuation, apparently," looking at Céleste, who has seated herself on her husband's knee, and is toying with his watch-chain.

"No, and I trust never shall be," says Pierrepont, patting tenderly the little raven head lying on his shoulder. "Shall we, Little One?"

"Not as long as you love and trust me," says "Little One," with truth enough in her eyes to deceive the Archangel himself.

"This is becoming unbearable," said her mother, with a mock gesture of disgust. Mentally she is lost in admiration of her daughter's powers of *finesse*. "I am going to be very disagreeable," she continues, with apparent candor. "Pray tell me whether you play to the world such scenes of conjugal bliss as you are making me an unwilling spectator of now? If so, why,

pray, is it, my child, that all Paris says my daughter is a butterfly? I have heard this lately, and speak to you of it before Joseph."

A quick, comprehensive glance passes between the women. Then Céleste, burying her head in her husband's shoulder, clings tighter to him, saying appealingly, with the brown eyes half suffused in tears, "Oh, Joseph, do not let her say that!"

"My darling, hush!" he says soothingly. "Why, what a baby you are, Céleste!" with a very worthy imitation of sharpness. "One would think you were some child still in the nursery."

"Oh! but I hate to hear that said even in jest," Céleste answers feelingly.

"But you ought to have some woman staying with you, nevertheless," continues her mother, seriously, as though the idea had just presented itself to her, — "some one, of course, who would be congenial to you. Don't you think so?" turning to her son-in-law, adding, "Céleste is so foolishly, childishly sensitive to public opinion, and withal so innocent, that her kindness is apt to be misconstrued, so that

really I should feel a great deal more comfortable if I knew that she had some one,— Madame St.-Claire, or some other pleasant woman."

"Never!" says Pierrepont, warmly; "she is no fit companion for Céleste."

"Why?" asks Céleste, innocently, while she makes a covert grimace at her mother.

"Because, my darling," answers her husband, "rank weeds and fair flowers do not grow together without the weeds growing up and choking the flowers."

"Well, doubtless you are right," assents her mother, adding, "I only wish that circumstances would allow me to be oftener with the child. You have no relations in America, Joseph, no pretty cousins, Céleste's age?"

"But I certainly have," he answers, his face brightening, "and I believe, my darling," enthusiastically, "that you would like them. They are both sweet, lovable girls. Suppose, Sweetheart, I send for them, send for them to come to France? I feel confident that they would be companionable."

Céleste is more than pleased at the sugges-

tion, and that evening Pierrepont writes to America, asking permission of the girls' guardians to permit them to come to France for an indefinite visit.

"What type of women are they?" Céleste asks of her husband.

"The best type of American womanhood, — gentlewomen by birth and breeding. Kate, who is the older, was quite a social success here two years before we were married. I found myself besieged with invitations and attentions on her account. She is a young woman not twenty, quite a *mondaine*, — a girl of strong character, a degree conservative, a very pretty woman, eyes and coloring something like yours, although you possibly are not so tall. Rose is of the blond type, a year or two younger, a bright, vivacious little thing; but it is Kate who is the stronger character. I think that you would like them both very much. While they are very much of the world, they have not been at all spoilt by it. Yes, if they decide to come they ought to be here in time for your ball; and I hope, my darling, that their coming will give you pleasure."

CHAPTER II

THE last copy of "Town Topics" announced that Miss Langdon would leave New York for Belmont-on-the-Hudson the following week, which meant, in other words, to convey that the family of Mr. and Mrs. Langdon and their two nieces, the Misses Langdon, were going for a sojourn to their country-seat.

It was always Katharine Langdon's personality that dominated that of all the rest of the family, — not an unkind nor unamiable dominancy, but an indisputable one.

It is sundown when the letter from France reaches its final destination. On the low porch of the house stands a girl in the first flush of early womanhood. She is tall and straight as a cedar, with a pale face, and a wondrous pair of searching black eyes, and the manner and carriage of a queen. Her white gown, as she stands on the porch in the uncertain shadow of

the twilight's glow, goes to increase her height, which seems little less than majestic as she turns to take the letter from the maid, who announces that there are guests in the drawing-room.

"Say that I am coming," and she turns to cast a regretful backward glance at the fiery, dying sunset, with its remnant of gold showing now faint and red behind the palisades in the distance.

The letter and its contents received considerable discussion that night, and at the breakfast-table the following morning.

"I rather like the idea," said Miss Langdon, looking at and admiring her sister's blond prettiness in this strong morning light. "Rose, you really are not bad looking," she says, irrelevantly adding, "What do you think? Shall we go?"

"I shall miss you so much," says her aunt, "and I did think that your uncle and I would now have you girls quite to ourselves for a few months."

"I would like to go," said Rose, "but —"

"'O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou?'"

suggests her sister, teasingly. "Well, one thing is certain, Rose, we can't take him with us. I had quite enough of the young gentleman on the yacht last month. Between your seasickness and his lovesickness my personal enjoyment was reduced to a minimum, which I don't intend to permit again."

"He thinks you are very sarcastic and hard," says Rose, vindictively.

"He does? Bless the youth!" answers her sister, laughing. "'God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man.'"

"But are you girls going to leave me?" asks her aunt, plaintively. "I can see, Kate, that you are. Well, if it must be, your uncle and I will follow you over in the fall, and bring you home."

"I have a great curiosity to see Joseph Pierrepont's wife," says Miss Langdon. "Had Joseph been born poor and obscure, the world would have heard from him. His vast wealth, however, has made impossible the development his strong character otherwise would have had. Many a time I used to watch him in Paris, realizing all these possibilities, and regretting

that they would never be used. I do wonder what sort of woman he has married. They say that men of intellect rarely marry clever women. She is probably a good woman and a beautiful one; but the husband rôle is hard to reconcile with his indifference, which, when I knew him, was so characteristic and so sincere with him."

That evening a letter of acceptance is sent to France. Miss Langdon walks down to the local post-office to mail it, wondering at herself at the pleasure she feels in the prospect of going. Self-analysis and retrospection are essential features of the girl's character, and it vaguely annoys her that she does not always understand herself. She possesses a most subtle knowledge of human nature, although her youth has been that of most girls in the same position of life. She has an exquisite vein of humor, and a lively vigor of narrative that makes her conversation charming.

Left alone, as she and her sister had been, at an early age, perhaps a little over indulged, and too great an amount of liberty acceded to her by her present guardians, the girl had been

taught to feel and act for herself,— to rely rather upon the impulses and dictates of her own heart than on the advice of others. A strong moral comprehension of right and wrong generally harmonized with the conventionalities of life with which she came in contact. She had had many lovers,— her beauty and position alone would have brought these,— and among them had been men of whose names their country had reason to be proud. With none had come to her feelings of reciprocation. Not a trace of womanly coquetry was discernible in her. The petty frivolities and weaknesses characteristic of most women seemed in their smallness beneath her.

When she returns home the moon has risen above the trees, ungenerously disclosing to her view her sister seated on the porch with her lover's arm around her.

"Psyche and Cupid, Romeo and Juliet, Patrick and Bridget!" she calls out laughingly. "I gave a most discreet ahem! coming up the walk, seconded by the dogs, but you both seem too engrossed in a contemplation of the moon to notice us. Now, can you tell me," address-

ing the man, a rather handsome young fellow of twenty or twenty-one, "how many miles that same moon is from here? You can't! Nor you, Rose? I am quite ashamed! Nor *you*, Carlo? Nor *you*, Lion?"

"You are the most ridiculous woman, Kate, that ever lived!" exclaims her sister, adding plaintively, with a long-drawn sigh, "I have just been telling Jack that we may go to France."

"And what does Jack say?" asks her sister, mimicking the despair in her voice.

"He says I shall not go," says little Rose.

"Oh, he does!" answers Miss Langdon. "Well, of course that settles it. I was about to go upstairs and begin my preparations for the journey, but now, since Jack has vetoed it, of course it is all settled!"

"If you are determined to be disagreeable, we will not talk to you," says her sister, a trifle shortly.

"Disagreeable?" she answers. "Why, I am the very personification of maudlin amiability! Proceed, my dears, with your pathetic confidences; but if Jack would push your head a

little farther from his shoulder I think I could bear their recital better. I am not 'sympathetic'? Possibly not, but you will admit that it is rather goading to look on monopolies of that kind with no hopes of a participation. But for fear Jack will think that I am 'sarcastic and hard,'" with a mischievous twinkle in her eye, "I will listen to you."

The boy flushes slightly. He has rather an exalted opinion of this pale-faced, black-eyed girl's powers, and is rather sensitive to her ridicule and sarcasm, which is meted out to him as often as her caprice wills. This love affair in her eyes had no elements of the tragical. It was a little madrigal of love that circumstances alone had brought about. He was eligible enough in family position and wealth, but Rose was such a whimsical, inconsequent, inconstant little butterfly, that Kate had never taken the affair between the two seriously. Consequently all their demonstrations of affection only served to increase her amusement,—a sentiment, perhaps, she was not so kind in disguising as she might have been. So it is with good-natured forbearance that she sits

down on the steps of the porch and prepares to listen to the recital of young Love's woe.

"I am trying to convince Rose," the young fellow began, in a tone of hesitancy, half fearful of hearing the low, mocking laugh of amusement, "that it would be better for us to marry before she goes."

As he speaks, the fragrant scent of the lilacs is borne on the air, and a pervading sense of peace, with its moon-lighted softness, rests on all around them. She knows that they have come to her first, and that what she says will have much weight with them. Surely, if they both thought this was love between them, why should she teach them the fallacy of it? Besides, how could she make Rose believe that this present, all-absorbing passion of hers was only what she considered one of the many episodes inevitable to the susceptible youth of most girls? Why also should she, so little older, set herself up as a mentor or prophet of the ugly awakening to this pretty, idealistic little play now being enacted here among the lilacs and the soft, seductive moon? And there was something charming about it. For

once she hesitates to say anything unkind. Suppose this was love? Because it had never yet come to her, could not it have touched and made glorious their two lives? Then her keen sense of the ridiculous asserts itself as she thinks, with a suppressed smile, "And that boy to make any woman's life glorious!"

"You want my advice?" she asks, finally breaking the silence which they had with unbroken patience waited on. "I do not think that I have any to give. Act as your own hearts, or rather heads, dictate. The less your hearts, in the condition they are now in, have to do with it, probably the more satisfactory the results will be. You are very much in love?" quizzically.

"Jack, she is getting hateful again. Do not talk to her," says Rose, looking very serious.

"I do not care for your ridicule," says the boy, speaking with sudden vehemence. "Our love may be nothing to you, but yet life and death to us. We, who love, and you who do not know what it means! With all your intelligence and analysis of others, there is not one spark of the womanly pity and love that lies

within Rose's heart here. Because we are young you think that we are not capable of anything but the momentary feeling all young people are subject to; that our love will be as transient and short-lived as the summer hours passing now. You little know how I love her; and I shall love her forever! Your intelligence may be very high, but until you feel yourself what it is to love some one, you will scarcely understand or sympathize with us. You see in my words, to quote you, 'the outburst of a passionate, hot-headed, lovesick boy,' while in reality it is a record of my life's dedication to Rose. I know the influence you have over Rose, and the contempt you have always had for me. Because I was young, and sensitive as we all are to mockery, I have permitted you to retain this opinion, little caring as long as I had Rose's love. Now that the time has come when you have so much to say in the balance of my life's happiness, I want you to see me as I am, and recognize that my love for Rose is no boyish, fleeting passion, but a part of my very life, capable, a lifetime hence, of its present intensity. If she will not marry me

before she goes, I commit her to your care, and ask you to keep her for me as pure in mind and soul as she is now. Please do not look upon this as the rhapsody of a lover. I realize as keenly as you do the effect of society in Paris on a pure but unmoulded mind. I only ask of you this, to try to realize that I am a man, and capable of a man's strength of feeling, and that I will try to make my life worthy of Rose."

"I have wronged your lover, Rose," said her sister, after the young fellow had left them. "I used to think that Jack was a great fool, but he is not. He is a manly, honorable fellow. It is you now whom I consider not worthy of him. I have decided to go to Paris, and we may as well discuss our plans before going in. I shall take Brooks as chaperone and maid with us, if Aunt May will consent. As for you, dear, do you really care to go, or would you prefer to remain home and be near Jack? There is no reason, a little later, why you should not marry him, if you care to. I think that he is a good man, and loves you truly. Your going shall be optional."

She looks at her sister as she sits with the full rays of the moon falling on her young face, and is struck by its consummate prettiness. Her sister's eyes are so large, and the mass of her blond hair falls over her shoulders! Though nearer robust in build, and not possessing the delicate lines of her sister's figure, she was an exceedingly pretty woman. She had a warm, impulsive heart, and in her eyes her lover was perfection.

"I should like to go," she answers, very quietly for her, "if only to prove to Jack how strong my love is."

"Proving has its dangers, and does not always come out conqueror," suggests her sister, laughingly.

"I love him so!" said the girl, softly. "Do you know, Kate, that if anything were to happen to him, I should die! — dear, *dear* Jack!"

Her sister burst out into a derisive peal of laughter, at which heartless proceeding Rose percipitately gathers herself up and goes into the house, filled with righteous indignation.

"What an unlooked for amount of force that boy has!" soliloquizes the woman left seated

on the steps below. "How conventionality misinterprets us! Then again, how like rant his speech would have sounded in the full glare of the day's sun, but said here, amidst the lilacs and the moonlight, it even affected me, and carried with it a conviction I thought impossible. I will do the best I can for him, but I have not much faith in Rose's constancy. So she would like to go to show him how strong her love is," she adds to herself, amused. "If she really loved him, as if anything on earth could persuade her to leave him! and yet, I have not the least doubt that she believes this is actual love she feels. I suppose there are women who live and die, and into whose lives there never comes the faintest dawn of a great or intense passion that seems to glorify and fill to repletion those few whose souls are capable of its requirements."

She leans her head against the pillar of the porch and dreamily thinks of many things, — of her youth that has as yet no lover. She laughs a little as she thinks of it, but the smile around her delicate mouth is half wistful, nevertheless, "I dare say," she thinks, "if it were

possible for me not to think, not to analyze each action of my life and others, I, too, might be happy in the way of the average woman. My supposed high intelligence and unerring penetration that I value so much, what are they but a preventive, a deprivation of a possible contentment, that seems to fill and satisfy most women's lives! Perhaps I am no cleverer, only more egotistical than the others. Men, though, all seem so weak to me, with so little about them of what real manhood should be. A man acceptable to me," she thinks, "would have to be one of the highest culture and intelligence; of an impassioned and profound temperament. He must possess a strong moral sense that no temptation would be effectively strong enough to influence, and one doing right for the sake of right itself; one who would alleviate the misery of humanity wherever the opportunity afforded, not from any love of ostentation, but prompted by an innate generosity of spirit which my Utopian man must possess to an abnormal degree."

She admits to herself that all these traits are very improbable.

"Kate, are you going to stay out there dreaming all night?" calls her sister from one of the upper windows; "do you know that the clock has struck twelve? What have you been thinking about?"

"I am coming in now," answers Miss Langdon, rising. "I will tell you what I have been thinking about. I have been regretting that there is no Ferdinand to sigh over *my* departure."

Down goes the window with a bang, while a low laugh of amusement comes from the woman leaning over the balustrade. "Nor am I sure that I was not sincere," she adds, half to herself, "and if 'as once of old a knight in gold' should suddenly appear, whether I should not greet him with 'soft words of love.'"

Then she laughs out merrily at the conceit, the echo as gently catching and returning the music of her voice.

They sail on one of the Cunarders from New York a few weeks hence. Brooks, who has been half maid, half companion, to old Mrs.

Langdon for years, goes with them as chaperone, her aggressive looks quite belying the genial, good-natured disposition of the woman. Mrs. Langdon, whose heart is almost broken over the departure of these children whom she loves so well, consoles herself by remarking, half pathetically, half humorously, "At any rate, Kate, you, with your unapproachable air, and Brooks's warlike aspect combined, will be a preventive of all intrusion which the beauty of you girls might have provoked."

Rose's pretty, baby face is wan and haggard, her great blue eyes swollen with excess of weeping. Jack is no less pale. That he is suffering keenest misery is palpable to every one. By tacit consent they are left together on the wharf, where they are conscious only of themselves and the sad, sad woe of parting. Jack tries ineffectually to be cheerful, but finally gives himself up to the unmitigated pleasure of despair.

Very pretty and idealistic is the picture of Rose's arms clinging convulsively around her sweetheart's neck. Her sister, noticing it, and seeing that others did also, turns to one of the

men near her, saying, with an indulgent smile: "Nevertheless I think it is very pretty, very real, — an epigram in itself! I only hope, however, Menelaus will not be forgotten when Paris shall have appeared. I am very much afraid such will be the case; nevertheless you shall not laugh at them."

As she bids farewell to the boy she whispers, "I will take care of her for you and she shall not forget."

The passage over was an uneventful although rather a rough one. Rose was inconsolably afflicted with nostalgia. Poor Brooks was *hors de combat* from seasickness, and her young charges were mercilessly unsympathetic.

There were quite a number crossing, many of whom were acquaintances of the Langdons. They were out several days before Rose concluded that she had remained miserable sufficiently long to warrant a beginning of recuperation. Nor was she long oblivious or indifferent to the overtures and general focus of admiration directed towards them by their fellow passengers; especially from one or two

of the younger men, who, Rose confided to her sister, did not look "half bad."

"Of such vacillating creatures men make their idols," says her sister, not without some wonder. But her surprise is not so great when, a few mornings later, Rose joins her on deck, quite enthusiastic over an interview she has had with one of the men, whom she had discovered to be one of Jack's most intimate friends. This, in itself, is sufficient introduction and excuse for Miss Rose daily and nightly to pace the deck arm in arm with "Jack's old friend."

Her sister smiles her skeptical smile, but says nothing. She comes to a sudden determination and conviction that Rose would be as happy with one man as with another, and that she herself, perhaps, would prefer Jack.

Brooks recovers sufficiently to make a presentable appearance the day before their arrival. The friendship between Rose and "Jack's friend" had developed into a Platonism of the most pronounced type, and sighs and soft hand-pressures were quite the order of

events. The happy, animated face of Rose, as the steamer ploughs her way nearer to the Havre dock, which is black with the crowds waiting the arrival of friends, contrasts strangely with the woe-begone little face that had been kissed so tenderly in farewell a week ago.

They had written to Joseph Pierrepont, telling him the day of their departure and their probable arrival, and on afterthought had cabled the number of their state-room. He sees them at once, makes his way to them, and says cordially, showing the evident pleasure he feels, "Welcome, many times, to France! How are you all? Céleste is just wild over your coming! Fate has been so good to me, Kate! so good to me! Rose, I declare, you have grown out of all recognition! Brooks, I am so glad that you came over with them! They never would have gotten here safely without you."

They are now on the train steaming to Paris. Pierrepont, with a smile at the remembrance of it, is telling them how childishly delighted Céleste has been over their expected arrival.

"She is only a lovely child," he says, with fond enthusiasm, "unaffected and unsullied by the conventionalities and falsities of the life around her."

Miss Langdon listens to him, and half wonders what fashion of woman this may be who is so perfect a creature in the eyes of this hypercritical cousin of hers. She remembers so well his exactness a few years ago in this respect. She looks at the clear-cut, decided features, the contour of face and head, and wonders again what manner of woman this may be who can command this enthusiasm from him.

It was early morn when they finally reached their destination, the Pierrepont mansion, and Paris had not yet awakened. The servants of the household were all in readiness to receive them. Pierrepont tells them that he has sent word to his wife's women to wake her earlier than is their wont. He conducts them himself to the apartments prepared for them, bidding them *au revoir* until breakfast.

"How exquisite the house is!" says Kate. "If this be his wife's taste, she has something of the artist in her."

While Brooks began the unpacking of the trunks there was a little knock at the door, and Céleste rushes in in the *dishabille* of her rose-color morning robe. Her long, luxuriant hair is falling wet and unheeded over her shoulders, and her small white feet are minus stockings or slippers.

"Joseph told me you were here!" she cries effusively in French, embracing first one then the other. "I was in my bath, I so wanted to be up and ready to welcome you, and here you are already arrived," with a charming, child-like pout. "I am so, *so* happy that you are here," with a little vivacious gesture of clasped hands. "We are all going to be so happy together! How beautiful *you* are!" with an involuntary exclamation of surprise.

Miss Langdon smiles and thanks her, keeping her eyes fixedly on the beautiful, laughing face of her cousin's wife, drawing her own inferences meanwhile.

Nor is Céleste unconscious of this scrutiny. "That woman is no fool," she is saying to herself. Then she turns to Rose, offering delicate little attentions to which young girls are so

susceptible. She praises her eyes, her figure, the gold of her hair, and then, out of sheer impetuosity, draws her suddenly to her, kissing her again and again, at the same moment wondering whether her husband will find the girl sufficiently attractive to insure her own greater freedom.

With many repeated caresses, and the playful injunction not to be longer than a half-hour making their toilet, she leaves them, going immediately to her own rooms, where her mother, with the greatest curiosity imaginable, is waiting for her reports.

"They are both pretty women, *very* pretty women!" Céleste says. "The little one may be a fool, but the other one is *not!* She will be an impediment, not an aid, to any plans that we may have. They are both far from being the bucolic children of nature my fool of a husband represented them. The tall one is entirely too much my type to be agreeable in such close proximity. She may have something of the *sensitive* about her. I thought I detected it, but she has also a good deal of common sense. I suppose now that they are here they

will have to remain a while. I will get rid of them as quickly as I can. The smile of that older girl is a history in itself! She is a wise one, that one. They are not what we want!"

"Is n't she charming?" says Rose, admiringly enthusiastic, "and so perfectly natural, too!"

"Yes," replies her sister, evasively, "she is a remarkably pretty woman, and is certainly very cordial in her welcome."

CHAPTER III

THREE months have passed since we closed the above narrative, three months prolific with events. It is noon, the hour when Parisian women seek their *boudoirs* either for those *tête-à-têtes* of two denied to young wives treated with too much rigor, or for reasons *ad infinitum* best known to the sex themselves. At any rate, it is the hour acceded to be their own, on the privacy of which no wise husband will intrude.

Céleste and Rose are together in Céleste's flower-like *boudoir*, both women charmingly gowned. The soft lights of the sun penetrate through the rose-colored shades. The fire burns comfortably in the æsthetic fireplace, around which amorous cupids in gold and white are playing hide-and-seek with the struggling flames of the coals. Céleste, in her soft draperies, is idly puffing forth clouds of smoke from her cigarette, and Rose is leisurely rolling

one. The three months have cemented a wonderful friendship between the two. With Rose, the conquest has been a very easy one. The girl's puerile vanity has been flattered by the preference shown her, and her imbibition of Céleste's theories and principles has been, alas! not the work of weeks, but of days only. Those things that had seemed to her most wrong had been as suddenly, credulously, accepted as right. The power of a stronger will over a weaker, although not necessarily as vicious a nature, was clearly demonstrated here. Céleste's superior experience had made the girl as pliable as wax in her hands.

Céleste had realized very quickly that it was futile to expect her husband to become infatuated with Rose's type. Kate was equally impossible on account of her own indifference. Céleste therefore determined to derive what pleasure she could from the companionship of Rose, who, in her ready acquiescence to everything, was quite congenial. She even conceived the plan of making a good marriage for the girl, which, next to an *intrigue*, is the dearest thing to a Frenchwoman's heart.

Céleste and Kate never became intimate. They were both studiously courteous to one another, but beyond this they did not progress. The daily routine of the gay life they led absorbed much of Kate's time and thought, but ofttimes, especially during the mornings, she was thrown on her own resources. She would then join Joseph Pierrepont in the library, offering her assistance and knowledge, which was considerable, in a scientific work on some deep, abstruse subject which he was preparing, by which he hoped to make himself famous in the world of letters. But at no moment did Céleste's most sanguine hopes build any possibilities on this growing intimacy, which was such horrible, realistic, genuine Platonism.

"That woman is as hard as stone!" she had once said to her mother. "The most that we can expect from her is that she may make more interesting those musty old volumes that he pores over, and keep him longer in their perusal. What folly for as pretty a woman as she is to affect blue stockingism! As for Rose, she is different. A career is possible

for her. She has a lover. What signifies that? I will marry her. Then when he comes he will be still more her lover!"

Rose looks a little perplexed this morning as she rolls and unrolls the paper of her cigarette, Céleste smoking complacently. It is evident she has put some question to her companion, and is waiting for a reply. Finally Rose breaks the silence, raising her head with her eyebrows slightly elevated.

"But I am not sure," she is saying hesitatingly, "I am not sure that I do not love Jack."

"Nobody objects to your loving him, my dear," answers Céleste. "It would be hard to find a stronger advocate of that most excellent of all maladies than I, myself; and although I am neither a Juliet nor a Mignon, I can love. If you are the wise woman I take you to be, you will agree with me in thinking this offer a most providentially good one, and unquestionably accept it."

"But he is so ugly and old," weakly objects Rose.

"Pshaw!" says Céleste. "What signifies that in a husband? Perhaps it is even an ad-

vantage. Marry him now at once, and then send for your blue-eyed Hippolytus. How little you unmarried women understand men! As it is now, you are hedged around by the dull bounds of custom and propriety, if you overstep which, a hand's breadth, you are forever damned. If, on the other hand, you have a husband, and if he do not question (and they never do in this country), do you think that as long as he is satisfied the rest of the world will care or bother itself about you? As for your sister's foolish cant, you know, my dear, how antipathetically constituted you two are. She is incapable of feelings or impulses which form so great a part of you, while you may be equally incapable of deriving pleasure from the sources which form the very essence of it to her. Marry this Monsieur Giron. He is a Frenchman, and will have no expectations of you except those of a Frenchman. Granted he is ugly, old, and physically repulsive, — 'con,' 'pro,' rich, old, and probably generous. Your youth, beauty, and amiability have caught his fancy. He offers you a big price for them, and in return for what? A little toleration of him,

which, if you have any tact, may be reduced to a very little indeed. You will have your establishment, jewels, and money unlimited at your disposal. If, on the other hand, you marry this American, who you say is not overburdened with worldly goods, do you think an existence with him will turn out an epigram or a poem? Rest assured hymenial felicity, if not backed by Mammon, is a Utopian figment worthy of fools' minds only. But Jack will always love you? Ah, dear, when you shall have learned the world as well as I you will know 'always love' are words not in the marriage vocabulary. He may always be your lover, that is possible; but once your husband, that is equally impossible. Marry Monsieur Giron and then send for your lover. Do you remember what Henri was saying to us last night, — '*L'amité est l'amour sans ailes.*' That is just it; as long as marriage is not a factor of it, love has no desire to take wing. It is the unattainable, the impossible, that makes it desirable. This sweetheart of yours is a pretty boy, judging from his photograph, and I dare say quite as admirable a lover. Therefore why hesitate? Because I

love you I will confess that I have used some diplomatic manœuvre to obtain this alliance for you, and shall be sorely chagrined if its success is marred by your refusal. Only think, Rose, of an existence led here as an acknowledged power in society, compared to the isolated, humdrum one which is inevitable in your country with its narrow laws. Believe me, it is only the poets who make such conditions at all acceptable. Your quondam lover will have become your friend, adoring you a thousand times more than if he were your husband. As for the probable exacerbations of feeling from your sister, with a little care we can manage that. I really can't see why she should be consulted at all. Rose, did she ever have any lovers?"

"Kate? Dear, yes," answers Rose, "numbers; and so many advantageous financial ones! She was always thoughtful, just as you see her, either ridiculing people or coldly indifferent. She used to think that Jack was a fool, and laughed at me because I loved him. One day he grew angry at her contempt and spoke out, and since then she has seemed to have a higher

opinion of him, telling me repeatedly that I was not worthy of him."

"You, with your beauty and freshness, not worthy of a lovesick country lad! Faugh!" answers Céleste, scornfully; "why," flatteringly, "you have beauty enough to set Paris wild if you have only the courage. Marry, for Heaven's sake marry, for you cannot have any real liberty until you do. But tell me, Rose, has Kate never had a lover who was acceptable to her?"

"No," answers Rose, "I do not think that she ever has. One of the officers stationed in the harbor loved her. I almost loved him because of the strength of his love for her. One morning they came and told her that he had shot himself because Kate had persistently refused him. She would not believe that she was the cause of his death, and insisted that it was drink (he drank a little) that had driven him to it. Yet, Céleste, she is neither cruel nor selfish. As Auntie has often said, as long as Kate is sure of the motive that prompts an action, no one can be more sympathetic than she; but she is so incredulous! Jack used to

say that she would have to have the poison Juliet took analyzed before she would actually accept it as poison. She is most tolerant of all faults, looking upon them somehow as weaknesses with which humanity is originally endowed, believing that she is the only exception to the general rule. Her creed is, exculpation to every one but herself."

"Do you think that she is so very beautiful?" asks Céleste, in a tone impossible to translate.

The truth of it was that this American girl, with her stately, patrician beauty, and dignified coldness, was becoming the theme of all Paris. Céleste in no way relished the possible eclipse of her own fame and popularity. The girls' nationality had been permittive of considerable laxity and privileges, impossible to unmarried French girls of their age, and consequently they enjoyed very much the same freedom that is allowed to married women only in France. The fact of their being Americans cast a glamour around them, and increased the interest felt for them by the Frenchmen. Impossible, erratic actions were expected of them, and

if they never came, the expectation itself kept the interest alive. Rose, under Céleste's tuition, however, soon came up to expectation, and the change from an innocent, pure-minded girl into a *grande dame* of the most approved French type was rapidly taking place.

It had been different with Kate. Unsusceptible, strong, and moulded as her character was, contamination could not affect her. The pageant was a pleasing one to her, but her natural good sense made her thoroughly understand it as it was. A great writer has said that "the *absence* of temptation *is* virtue." I think, however, that in many cases this is erroneous. Virtue rather is born of three things: an inherited strong moral sense; diet, — this an important factor; and prenatal contingencies.

As soon as Rose became Philistined, just so soon did the interest in her in a measure decrease. With these conventional, oversated Frenchmen, Kate still remained a novel type, an impossible, unapproachable, curious type to them. When Rose should be married, then possibly would the interest in her be revived.

Then would come the calculation of "Madame's" possible lovers. Had Kate Langdon been a less beautiful woman the probabilities are that she would have been passed with that expressive French shrug that consigns everything to the Devil which is in opposition to it; but seen every night at the balls, theatres, and Legations, her beauty had become something for all Paris to talk of.

Pierrepont was determined that the girls should see the life of the great metropolis in its bravest, gayest colors, and spared neither expense nor pains to accomplish this intention. Surely it was nothing more than natural if he were oftener seen at Miss Langdon's side than at his wife's. Céleste was always surrounded by a bevy of men, making access to her almost impossible.

Céleste's popularity was such a gratification to her husband! With his liberal-mindedness, her triumphs to him were only the just appreciation of her worth. The world had now discovered that which he had known always. He had been slightly annoyed by some whispered reports of his wife's friendship with

Henri de Thysbaert being warmer than mere friendship should permit. Henri, poor devil! in whom Céleste had taken a sisterly interest, and to whom she had doubtless administered advice that would save him from the influence of the baser womankind of Paris. After the arrival of his cousins no atomatic cloud had risen to mar the calm of Joseph Pierrepont's horizon. The moral barometer was fixed at fair, very fair indeed!

"But you have not answered my question," Céleste is saying, resuming her conversation with Rose. "Do you think that your sister is beautiful?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," replies Rose; "everybody has always called Kate beautiful. Sometimes I have heard women say that she was cold and repellent, but I never heard a man say that she was anything but lovely."

"She has a style and individuality quite her own;" admits Céleste; "but to me, unless she poses as Iphigenia, or," laughingly, "Minerva, she seems — what shall I call it? — inconsistent with her surroundings! I can't call it *déclassée*, for that always conveys to me a bourgeois ele-

ment. But can you imagine her smoking, for instance?"

"Oh, I have seen her smoke," answers Rose. "Before papa died, she always had her evening smoke with him; but then, you know, she was nothing but a child. She never smokes before any one now, because she says she recognizes how ungraceful and offensive it must be to some people."

"Rose (ah, weak Céleste!), tell me frankly, do you think that she is as good-looking as I am?"

"You are so much the same style," says Rose, not wishing to offend, but conscious that as pretty as Céleste is, with her delicate coloring, still her tall, fair sister has more claims to actual beauty than Céleste could ever have.

"Her figure is magnificent," admits Céleste, "but what possible advantage is that when she shrouds and wraps herself up like an Egyptian mummy! In these days, when the most rigid, particular people wear *décolleté!* Candidly, I think it is an affectation of prudery and mock modesty with her that causes her to show only the nape of her neck, when all Paris is showing

almost the whole of their bodies. It is all nonsense! There is no indecency in it. Fashion regulates these things, and if she were to decree that we appear in our pristine nudity there are not half a dozen well-formed women in Paris who would not follow her mandates. You can't tell me any differently. Your sister has such a superb bust and shoulders! Why under the sun does she not show them? Tell her sometime, when you are talking to her, that you heard that young De Farier ask me whether those projections were Nature's handiwork or artistic cotton productions? He was quite curious, and came to me as one most likely to know. No; she may be angry, but she won't be shocked. She has left the *ingénue* too far behind her for that. It is wonderful to me the difference in you two girls, having the same mother! Only see what a great affinity there is between us! How quickly we assimilated! Yet she and I have never advanced beyond the exchange of cold courtesies, and probably never shall, unless, perchance, Galatea awakes and steps down from her pedestal, and awkwardly takes a fancy to the same Pygmalion who

pleased my fancy. Then, *then*, I say, there might be trouble!"

"Not much danger of that," says Rose, who only half understands Céleste's constant metaphors. "Kate will never love any one as you or I might."

"To pleasanter themes," says Céleste. "Is n't Henri simply adorable! Such a lover as he is, Rose! Like one out of old romance. Just think, we have been friends for six months, and he has never bored me nor lost his temper seriously once. The dear fellow! How I do love him!"

"Yes," Rose answers, "he is very handsome, and he certainly adores you."

"Yes," says Céleste, "and he always will; but see what the 'might have been' could have been! He sees and is pleased with me when I am a girl. He negotiates with the family. We are married. Three months pass. We are bored to death with one another. He curses Fate; I curse Fate. Misery personified, misery perpetual! On the contrary, he meets me as a wife. I am impossible to him. It stimulates him. It is an incentive. I am to be possessed at all hazards.

Heaven and earth must be sacrificed if necessary. Oh, what zeal! Oh, what fervor! And all because I am *some other* man's wife. As your Solonic sister told me yesterday, 'Humanity, though most always weak, is sometimes very amusing.' I do not know now whether it was I she meant. She has such a faculty of veiling her irony and sarcasm that one never knows whether to grow angry or feel flattered at sharing her opinions. She is a very, very clever woman, that sister of yours."

"Did you hear her snub Carrolton yesterday?" asks Rose, not without a little pride in her sister's bravery. "He was standing by her horse when his wife's carriage passed. He feigned not to see it, and suddenly the carriage became entangled with others and there was danger of a serious accident. 'Your wife and children,' said Kate, pointing with her whip, —'but, true, they will want a *man's* assistance! Excuse me and I will send my groom.'"

"Well, but that only insures their hatred," expostulates Céleste. "Men hate women like that!"

"But she does not care, and it is this not

caring that seems so magnificent to me," says Rose, not without some reason.

"She is a type," says Céleste, conclusively, "but a type whose prestige will be short-lived. This very 'weakness of humanity' for which she has such contempt demands more staple and palatable food than condemnation, and to be reminded of its faults and imperfections. As Thackeray says, women, to be a success, 'must flatter, cajole, and lie to the opposite sex.' Let woman cease lying, and tell the plain, unvarnished truth to man, and how soon her reign will be over, and become irrevocably dead! But come, we have drifted into a discussion of your sister when you are, now, the more pertinent subject. Am I or am I not to go on with this marriage? For your own sake, do not let any foolish scruples of sentiment alone interfere with such an immense project."

Rose hesitates *au fond*, not bad at all away down in her girlish heart; only a vain, silly child, to whom all these stories of fabulous splendor seem very tempting. Then visions of her boy-lover come to her, the glance of his honest, steadfast eyes, his kisses on her face,

his implicit faith and trust in her, and of her own vows and promises given in return. Let it be said to her credit that these conjurgations fill her with feelings of shame and self-contempt. She dreads to incur the ridicule or displeasure of this woman whose opinion she values so highly, and is so, so anxious to keep. The voice of her tempter, softer than the cooing of a bird, continues:

"You surely can see, Rose, what a very impersonal thing it is to me, and that I am acting with a view to your advantage only."

"But listen, Céleste," she answers. "I would marry him, only I am afraid that Jack would despise me afterwards. He thinks, as Kate does, that a woman who will marry for other feelings than those of love is no better than those shameless women!"

"Poor child," thinks Céleste, "what a little fool she is, after all!"

"And I am afraid, as I said," continues Rose, not without a quivering of voice, "that Jack would not care for me afterwards."

"The 'Jacks' of humanity fortunately are in no such way constituted," says Céleste, laugh-

ing; "I will guarantee that he will care twice as much for you."

"But what will Kate say?" It is apparent Rose is weakening.

"What matters what she says?" answers Céleste; "why should she assume to possess any more judgment in such matters than you and I?"

"But he is going away," says Rose, with an involuntary shudder of repugnance at the mental picture of this dissipated, decrepit old man. He had seen her, and had offered to buy her as they bought young virgins of old in the market-places.

"Yes," says Céleste; "see how propitious everything is! You accept him, and you are free from the old dotard's presence up to almost the very day of the ceremony."

"But afterwards, *afterwards?*" shudders the girl.

"Nonsense!" says Céleste, in no way capable of understanding the girl's disgust. "Such notions as those are as far from realism in their disagreeableness as night is from day. Only think of the power you will be, of the position

you will hold, of your jewels, your liveries, your balls! I take it that you consent, and in return for the gift of your precious self you will be paid ten thousandfold for your sacrifice, if sacrifice it really is! Go to your sister, not in a pleading mood, but in an assertive one. I foresee very little actual opposition from her."

"Madame, Monsieur Henri is below," says Thérèse's voice. "Shall I admit him? Monsieur Pierrepont and Mlle. Langdon are writing in the library. They have only just gone in."

"Yes, tell him to come up here!" answers her mistress, then says to Rose, kissing her on the cheek: "Join us, dear, in half an hour. Probably some of the men will drop in for a cup of tea. Do not change your gown. You are too lovely as you are!"

"You are not discreet, Madame," ventures Thérèse, after the door has closed on Rose. "Mlle. Rose is wise, but Madame's ways are not hers. It is not well to put too much confidence in strangers. Madame must not think that I am jealous, but I would suggest to Madame to be wise in keeping her own counsel,

as Madame has always done. Mlle. Langdon the older is very observing, and sees a great deal more, Madame, than you give her credit for. Pardon me, but it is my love for you, my mistress, that gives me the courage to speak."

"All right, Thérèse," answers her mistress; "but show Henri up now!"

The man who enters Céleste's room is one of the handsomest men in Paris, and certainly one of the most profligate. The concession to his physical beauty by all women was as old and acknowledged a story as the Salic law of France. Céleste had been his last caprice, and because of her utter incapacity of any really elevated sentiment in their "friendship," succeeded in retaining him when a woman who would have loved him more would have signally failed. Not that Céleste did not love him. As far as her sensual, selfish organization was capable of such feeling, she felt for him, and, doubtlessly would go mad in her fury at the first signs of deviation from his allegiance. She looks very beautiful as she greets him this morning. The bright glare of day has no horrors for her. Her delicate, fair skin is impervious to all inspection.

She tells him, after a little, of the marriage she is about to make for Rose, and then speaks of the probable opposition they will have to encounter from Kate.

"You mean 'the ice deess,' as the Figaro calls her!" says her companion, laughing; "but ice must melt some day. It is the inevitable law of matter. Who knows? Perhaps it has thawed, and we are the dupes of ignorance of facts only."

"I think not," answers Céleste. "Her Ladyship, I imagine, has long ago come to the conclusion that God has centred all the wit, wisdom, and beauty of the universe in her. Such heights of self-satisfaction have been reached that she is perfectly invulnerable to all such petty attacks as other people's opinion of her."

"She is very beautiful!" he says unwisely.

"Yes, very!" assents Céleste, warmly, while mentally his words sorely displease her; "a little cold, but unquestionably beautiful!"

"Sometimes this coldness," he says, "is an absolute relief as an antidote to the other extreme which meets one on every side."

Céleste looks up, studies his expression atten-

tively, but is evidently satisfied that there is no personal application in his words, for she replies, "Yes, she certainly will never be accused of that."

This false magnanimity is not uttered without a brief struggle with her inclination to say something asperical, but her good sense warns her not to show either pique or resentment at this rather lavish praise her lover is bestowing on another woman.

"It is very amusing," she is saying languidly, and smiling, "to see her attention to Pierrepont. The ties of consanguinity, of course, make this intimacy proper; but, oh, the whole thing is inexpressibly amusing to me! My husband and this beautiful divinity of ice are closeted together every morning for hours, poring over old manuscript and musty volumes; co-laboring over a great work that is to astonish the whole world. Pierrepont, whom you know is very much in love with me, will come to me in the evenings, repentant, devoted, remorseful, that he has permitted himself to spend so much time away from me; speaks in rhapsodies of the brilliancy and phenomenal intellect of his

assistant muse. I would almost hope that he would fall in love with her, but I have sense enough to realize that her own thick armor of indifference would prevent any man from doing so."

Rose joins them before Henri departs, and unhesitatingly tells Céleste at once that she has been unable to see her sister.

"Or ask her blessing on your marriage," finishes Céleste for her, laughing.

While Céleste and Rose are sipping their tea with some "of Pierrepont's friends, you know," Pierrepont is saying to Kate in the study:

"You have no idea how valuable your assistance has been to me. The copiousness and flexibility of the English language has never been so clearly proved to me before. There is no difficulty in the acquisition of facts, but it will be to your facility of expression that the work will owe its general tone."

"It is a most fascinating occupation for me," she answers, pleased, "and I will confess, cousin mine, that I rather like your praise. But don't allow this reckless speech of mine

to increase your egotism, of which I fear already you possess more than a normal amount. Still, I really think you do seem to have more brains than the average man."

"I shall be more generous to you," he answers, "and unhesitatingly say that I know that you have more brains than the average woman. It is a great wonder to me, Kate, that you have never written. With your imaginative fancy and your vocabulary, nothing, it appears to me, would be more successful."

"Oh, I have written," she answers, — "nothing, perhaps, that was worthy of the laurel, but still work sufficiently admirable for a woman. In fact, I had quite a local reputation in New York, where most of the publishers were kind enough to accept the productions of my *divine afflatus*. The difficulty rose when my thought matured, and I waxed a little liberal in my opinions and sentiments. Apostasy, you know, is not yet fashionable, and their criticism and lack of appreciation rather disgusted me; so I stubbornly refused to write any more, although I had contracted to do considerable work for them. I cannot conceive why it is people

will always mix up one's own character and opinions with those of the imaginary beings which an author, as a writer, has the right and liberty to draw. Artists and authors should have no sex to the world."

"You have never shown me anything that you have done," says Pierrepont.

"I will," she answers, "if you care to look at them. Rose took a copy of one of my love stories to your wife the other night, and sometime toward daylight the next morning Rose awakened me crying, standing by my bedside. 'Oh, *why* did n't you let him marry her?' she demanded of me in the most tragical manner conceivable. I tried to assume gravity becoming the occasion, but failed, and on giving vent to my merriment was rewarded by having the book hurled at me with the uncomplimentary epithet: 'You heartless wretch! You have n't any feeling, anyhow! I bet you just made him die purposely.' I do not know what effect it may have had on your wife. I hope not so unpleasant a one."

"My darling is quite as sensitive as Rose," he answers, a smile lighting his face at the

mention of his wife. "What children they both are! I think it is simply marvellous, when we consider the number and kinds of people they daily come in contact with, for them to keep so thoroughly intact this freshness and innocence."

The woman looks at him as he speaks, and wonders how he can be so oblivious of the wrong going on, for her deeper knowledge of his character makes her realize that here alone he shows weakness. Knowing his intrinsic worth, combined with an almost woman's sweetness of temperament, his intellect, and his liberality, makes rise in her heart an undefined feeling of anger against the woman who calls herself his wife; and yet, who hardly allows a day to pass without outraging and reviling the sacredness of such a name, making such an ungenerous return for the man's undivided devotion. "When he shall have learned," she is thinking to herself, "he will be only miserable, and now he is so thoroughly happy in his fool's paradise!"

She answers him aloud, half quizzically. "What an ideal lover you must have made!

We are taught by the new school to look for Eros's death at the first touch of Hymen's torch, but perhaps all had not an Aphrodite for a wife, as you have!"

"Did you ever really see a prettier woman?" he asks enthusiastically; and Miss Langdon, without a suspicion of vanity, thinks first of her sister, then of herself.

"How truthfully Goethe has said," he continues, "that men's natures receive their purification by contact with pure women, that the earth is made a heaven, and Hell's dangers unfeared."

Kate's sense of the ludicrous rather overcomes her here, and she laughs out merrily, giving, as the cause for it, "the unlooked-for boyish enthusiasm in a man thirty-five years old."

"I believe that you are laughing at me," said Pierrepont, suddenly; and although his tone is half playful, there is also something resentful in it, too, at her levity.

"No," she assures him, "you are not the first Adam who has found perfection in his Eve. The only thing is"—a trifle more gravely—

"you must look out for the serpents that are constantly infesting the gardens of Paradise where the golden apples grow, and who steal them whether they wish to be stolen or not. A smile of friendship, a pleasant word, may be misconstrued, and made to form the basis of as vile a falsehood as ever exaggerated calumny has caused; and oh, the misery that it brings with it!"

He is surprised at her vehemence, as she so rarely deviates from the bantering, quizzical mood habitual to her. For this reason her intensity impresses him; and in the days to come — the days that are fraught with woe — he remembers her words, and the sad, sweet earnestness of her face as she spoke them. He had answered her then with mock gravity, "I perceive, Madam, that you have histrionic ability added to your other legionary accomplishments."

"I flatter myself that I have, to a certain degree," she answers coolly. "I will give you an example of it. Listen!"

Then throwing back her head with an imperious gesture, she recites for him some lines

of Moore's "Lalla Rookh." Her voice is exceedingly euphonious, and, not laboring under any disadvantages of superfluous modesty, she gives a truly enjoyable delivery of the words.

"Not a *Rachel*," she says, laughing, "nor yet a *Desclée*, but excellent in a way."

"Not as bad as I expected," he says, while in reality he is much charmed and surprised. "Has Céleste ever heard you?"

"No," she answers.

"Why not have some private theatricals for the next ball here?" he suggests. "Such talent must not be hidden, and Céleste, too, — I know she will be delighted!"

"Oh, yes, yes," says Miss Langdon with such assenting enthusiasm that for once even he is fooled, "it will be *so* nice! and we will have postures a yard long, of all colors, and our play shall be called the 'Nineteenth Century Capulets.' Joseph Pierrepont, Romeo; Madame Pierrepont, Juliet; and I — "

"You think that you are wonderfully funny, now, don't you?" he says, laughing in spite of his efforts not to. "Well, I have had quite

enough of your ungenerous ridicule and chaff," setting himself to work again.

A ball is to be given at one of the great houses of Paris to-night. Worth has conceived, in honor of the event, three marvellous confections of satin, gauze, and lace, for the ladies of the "Pierrepont House." The gowns have come home for final inspection, and Rose and Céleste have tried on theirs. Miss Langdon's, a creation of white and silver, suits to perfection her pale beauty. She has not seen Rose's nor Céleste's gowns, and is not a little surprised to hear Rose's voice asking admittance at her door at an early hour in the afternoon.

"I should think, Rose," Miss Langdon suggests, "that you had learned by this time the unreliable condition of my temper when aroused from my afternoon nap. Oh, yes, come in, now that you are there! What do you want? Heavens! Why, Rose!"

Rose stands on the threshold in her ball array; her arms, shoulders, and busts in all

their natural beauty in full relief, very full relief, against the background of her light amber draperies.

"It is n't — you do not think that it is too *décolleté*, do you?" she asks hesitatingly, rather impressed by the horror, real or feigned, in her sister's face.

"*Too décolleté?*" gasps Kate. "*Décolleté!*" Is that what you call it? Why, you are *naked!* How awkward of him to make it in that way! One would think that he was catering to the taste of one of 'De Rosa's' ballet girls. Of course you have come to ask me the best way of altering it?"

"No," answers Rose, sullenly. The knowledge that Céleste's is cut in the same pattern gives her courage to say resentfully, "No, I came for nothing of the kind. I came to show it to you only, and am not at all desirous of your giving any advice on the subject."

Kate half smiles, knowing full well whence this new independence comes.

"And you think that it looks well?" she asks quietly.

"Yes, quite well," answers Rose, shortly. "Henry de Thysbaert said I was 'a second Venus Aphrodite.'"

"Yes, just risen from the waves," assents her sister, dryly. "Yes, that is very appropriate. If we are to believe accounts, the lady you refer to was about as scantily arrayed as you are; I never knew, Rose, that you had a mole at your waist," taking an inventory of her figure, which Rose finds anything but agreeable.

"And is not," inquisitively, "your right bust a degree higher than the left? I suppose you are prepared for, and quite pleasantly anticipating, the remarks that your nudity will provoke. 'See the little American! There is a display of anatomy for you! Oh, I tell you, there is confounded little difference between the *monde* and the *demi-monde* when it comes to exhibiting themselves,' etc., etc.," imitating the speech and the manner of that type of men whom she knows Rose will recognize. "And many other pleasant remarks," she continues, "many, many worse things than that, my dear, alias your Venus-ship, only your

sister's excessive purity of thought forbids their utterance."

"How hateful you are!" says Rose, hotly, tears of mortification in her eyes. "Anyhow"—then follows the little story concerning her padding that Céleste had told her incidentally to administer.

Kate's aggravating smile takes possession of her face as she says quietly: "How beneficial this European trip has been to us! What gratifying results it promises! Such an accession of high thoughts and noble inspirations! I hope that Jack will not be such a barbarian as to fail to appreciate the improvement."

At the mention of her lover's name Rose slightly winces. What will Kate say when she knows that she, Rose, has half promised to sell herself to this old man? Surely now is her time to speak, if ever; now, when Kate herself has made a beginning by irrelevantly bringing in Jack's name. Yes, now is the time; but for some reason she cannot find utterance. The words seem to stick in her throat, and she imagines the surprise,

pain, and disgust that will be in Kate's face. Oh, why was not Kate like other people, amenable to the same weaknesses!

"So you really will wear that?" asks Kate again.

"Yes, I will," angrily from Rose.

Miss Langdon begins whistling, and settles herself back on the bed to resume her nap.

"Kate," says Rose, in a voice a degree milder.

"Venus," answers her sister, turning her head.

"Do you know that I hate you, *hate* you?" says the girl, angrily.

"No, I do not believe you do yet," answers Miss Langdon, "although I dare say that sisterly sentiment, under certain auspicious circumstances, will be reached in time. What can I do for you now?"

"I — I — want," said Rose, hesitatingly, — "will you lend me your pearls?"

"With pleasure," says Miss Langdon. "Brooks will give you the key to my box. Brooks, give Rose my key, and show her the

fan that came with my gown. She may have some use for it."

"But, Miss Kate, it is time that you were beginning to get ready yourself," suggests Brooks.

"I? Oh, no, I shall not go to-night," answers Miss Langdon.

"Not go?" says Rose in amazement, stopping midway between the room and the door. Not go to-night? Why, are you crazy? and your gown ready?"

"No, I don't think that I shall go," says her sister, indifferently; "and now both of you leave me. I am sleepy."

"Kate," says Rose.

"Yes," answers Kate, wearily.

"I — I — is it because of me that you are not going?" says Rose.

"Oh, no," answers her sister, sighing; "and, Rose, you must forgive me. As you said the other day, I am entirely too dictatorial with you; but, believe me, it is only because I love you so well. Now leave me, I am so sleepy."

Rose, watching her sister, is smitten with

sudden compunction. Surely she has no right to grieve Kate in this way. And looking in the mirror the dress does seem a little low, and yet there would be hundreds of others there cut as low, and even lower.

Through her half-closed eyes Kate sees the struggle going on within, and plays her last card. Sighing audibly, she asks gently: "Oh, Rose, would you not like to be home? I should. Sometimes I — I feel," successfully burying her head in the pillow, "so — so homesick! I seem so — so alone!"

This is too much for poor tender-hearted, susceptible little Rose. With a bound she throws herself on the bed, finery and all, and sobs out:

"Oh, don't, Kate! please don't talk that way! I will go wild if you don't stop; and, to think this old gown caused it all! Why, I — I never saw you this way before!" A sob, or a very good imitation of one, comes from the pillow at this moment. Its effect on Rose is wonderful.

"Oh, oh!" she moans. "Kate crying! She is sick; I know that she is. Wait!" spring-

ing to her feet, "just see how quickly I shall have this altered. It *is* too low, and to think, Kate, that you should worry so over me! Why — why," incoherently, "I am not — I am not worth it. Oh, Brooks, do bathe her head until I come. Please stop crying, Kate. I will be back immediately. It is no use denying it; I know that this odious dress is the cause of it all."

The door has barely closed on her excited little person before Miss Langdon raises her serene face, on which no traces of tears are discernible.

"Ugh!" she exclaims, "I thought I would smother down there. Lock the door, Brooks. I could not, you know, let her appear in that dress. I want her to show her neck and arms, but that was indecent."

"Miss Kate," exclaims Brooks, "I thought you were crying, myself. But you are right. These furrin' people have queer ways. She" (thus Brooks always designates Céleste, for whom she has little admiration) "is the queerest of them all. Standing up there, Miss Kate, so brazen-like before that Mr. Henrie, or what-

ever they call him, and 'How do I look?' and 'Am I not beautiful now?' and such like."

"But," said her mistress, amused, "how do you know what she said, Brooks? You do not understand French?"

"No, Miss Kate, that I don't; but manners speak plainer than words" — this homely maxim delivered with inimitable insinuation.

"I am afraid that they will ruin Rose between them," confesses Kate, with some anxiety. Brooks from her childhood had always been Kate Langdon's confidante, the girl going to her for advice in preference to her aunt.

"I don't like her," says Brooks, bluntly. "Miss Kate, she reminds me for all the world of a stinging bee inside a cake of honey. If you don't scrape too deep, maybe you can get some; but if you should happen to touch the bee, then look out, for it will sting, I tell you."

Kate laughs heartily over this original simile, and has barely sufficient time to sober her face, when Rose reappears with her gown altered. She extracts a promise from Kate to adhere to her first intention of going with them that evening.

"As though I could have been induced to stay home," Miss Langdon whisperingly confides to Brooks. "I have been having a battle of words with Rose," she is saying, not unintentionally, to Pierrepont, meeting him in the hall. "The cause? Oh, a disagreement in our tastes concerning the gown she wears to-night. It has not affected my outward calm, I hope?" Although she says it all smilingly, indifferently, she hopes that he will see the suggestiveness of what she is saying, and observe a little more critically Céleste's marvellous toilet, which is as near nudity as it was possible to be. As Kate said afterwards, confidentially, to dear old Brooks: "I was so afraid of meeting some of our own friends from New York. There are so many Americans in Paris just now, and I had no inclination to introduce that beautiful, naked thing as my cousin's wife. And oh, Brooks, did you see Rose with all her pretty, peachy skin covered over with rouge? It did seem such a pity!"

"How magnificent you are looking!" says Pierrepont to his cousin, patronizingly. And answering her question, "You certainly do not

show any signs of the recent conflict, in which, it is needless to surmise, you came off victor. Paris seeing you to-night will indeed see the personification of the *femme de glace*, with your white gown and those crystals that look so like icicles."

"That is too stereotyped an appellation for me to be flattered by it," she says indifferently. "It has become too much of an anachronism. I cannot call to mind one French novel I have ever read that did not have its *femme de glace*. I am sorry, however, if my 'gorgeous get-up,' as we Americans say, inspires no more original speech from *you* than the one you have just uttered. You take an altogether too dispassionate view of my surpassing loveliness."

She does look very beautiful. The seductiveness and charm of this girl's manner was most effectual because there was nothing of intentional seductiveness about it, no straining after effect or conquest. Her women acquaintances would look on her and wonder what was the secret of this indifference. That it was natural they had never accepted. Oh, no; they knew too well the impulses and desires

universal to all women. And here, in France, whose volatile daughters came in contact with her, to them she was an acknowledged phenomenon. They could not understand a woman who was beautiful, whose conduct was irreproachable, who eschewed marriage and rejected lovers. Absurd rumors of all kinds daily increased concerning her. Fame and notoriety are capricious, selfish powers, and, sorely against the woman's inclination, she found herself the Parisians' fad of the hour. Her *bon mots* and brilliant *reparties* were repeated everywhere. The women copied her gowns and style, and even affected her indifference itself, and were puzzled much when they found to their dismay that instead of retaining, it lost them their lovers. Because of Pierrepont's great wealth, and perhaps because of whispered rumors of Céleste's many escapades, of which the husband did not take the trouble to remark, the name was a well-known one in Paris, and the inmates of the great house were naturally a subject of interest to the world at large.

It is within a few moments of the hour of ten. Rose and Céleste have not appeared yet,

but Miss Langdon, dressed these two hours, is in the main hall, with Pierrepont and several other men waiting the other ladies' appearance. They are all jesting and laughing, and the men are as attentive to the pale, tall girl as she will permit them. Henri is there, and with the weakness characteristic of all men of his type, is rather chafing at the indifference displayed towards his irresistible self. The man is not exactly a coxcomb, but is so accustomed to the adulation of all women that the denial of it from one rather piques him. Miss Langdon sees this, and it amuses her, although she thinks with inward indignation, "I wonder whether he judges all women by his country-women, and that, as Catulus once said, 'a truly virtuous woman never lived.'"

"You are too skeptical altogether," one of the men is saying to her, in reply to some cynicism that she has just uttered; "you are like Pyrrho, the philosopher of Elis, who doubted everything. You are, pardon me, too beautiful a woman to go in for that sort of thing."

"My fierce philippic against your theories,"

she answers, refusing to be further drawn into argument, "rises, I fear, from a spirit of innate antagonism, which, I regret to say, never leaves me."

Her companion endeavors to continue the conversation, but as she sees the motive is one of idle curiosity, she refuses, asking Pierrepont the hour, and whether it is not almost time for the others to descend.

"Ah, Monsieur Henri!" she says, with a little wicked merriment in her eyes, as she lifts them and sees who it is who has crossed to her side, "are you growing impatient? She will not be long."

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle; you speak in enigmas. How can I be accused of impatience now that I have finally succeeded in reaching my goal,—your side?" while he thinks, "The Devil! How dare she?"

"I have been trying," she continues, "to have Lord Gorn enlighten me on the liberties and franchise of the marriage contract in this country. He was not at all explicit. Perhaps you can be."

"I fear, Mademoiselle, that I am as little

competent as he to give you any information, that being a subject I have never seriously regarded."

"That is what I told him when he referred me to you," says Miss Langdon, innocently.

"Pardon me?" he asks.

"That is what I told him," she repeats.

If she waxes disagreeable, he suddenly reasons to himself, it must be the outgrowth of some interest.

"I suppose," he says aloud, in his ever euphonious voice, "that you look upon as valueless the admiration of one man, when all Paris will be raving over your loveliness to-morrow?"

"Yes, oh, yes; and what a nuisance to be the possessor of such loveliness, is it not?" she says naïvely.

He half smiles. What a combination of child and woman there was here! "You are quite a puzzle to me," he says, with sudden frankness, all conventionality and mannerism of speech leaving him.

"Yes?" she says. "You are not the only one. I cannot remember a period of my existence that such adjectives as erratic, eccentric,

phenomenal, callous, abnormal, etc., have not been freely applied to me. The only disagreeable feature of it is that I am always left in doubt as to whether the possession of these wonderful attributes is to be considered an advantage or not."

"As far as a man is able to understand womankind, I flatter myself that I do," he says; "but I admit that you are unfathomable to me."

"Yes. I do not think," she says gently, if the words themselves are unkind, "that your observation has been among women constituted as I am. In our Republic there are hundreds and thousands of women possessing the same peculiarities that I possess; the only difference, perhaps, between them and me lies in the manner of showing them. As a rule, with very, very few exceptions, American women are pure and good. We have few Phædras and Clytemnestras!"

"You mean to say," he says, slightly amused, and yet vaguely irritated at her insinuation, "that I have never had the fortune to meet any of the Gretchens or Theklas of the world."

"Oh, no," she answers lightly; "but I dare say that they would not have suited you if you had. You may have met what was originally they, but they had gone through such a thorough transformation that their first condition was not recognizable. Two or three coats of your Piver paint, a few hours of consultation with Worth, a good preceptor, two or three weeks' intercourse with one of the initiated, and, lo and behold! you have a new woman, with a new conscience, a new God, a new everything!"

"What you say may be true," he answers.

"You know that it is," she replies; "but," laughingly, "I dare say the spurious article is the only one marketable here. The others can't stand importation. My sister," smilingly, "is in the hands of the artisan now, but I prefer the home trade-mark uneffaced, and will do all I can to keep it so."

"What a unique woman this perfect woman of yours must be! Describe her," he says, with a view to annoy the men waiting to talk to her. He had never secured so long a *tête-à-tête* with her before, and was rather gratified

by his success. Then her physical beauty appealed to him strongly. Like one of Byron's heroes, a woman perfectly formed always gave him "sensations like a villain."

"A perfect woman?" she laughs. "How oddly that sounds, coming from you! Well, such a woman does not exist, and if I were to give you a delineation of my ideal woman, to you she would be beyond the realms of possibility."

"You are unkind," he says, in his best manner, his eyes taking on the expression that has won him more than one susceptible female heart.

"Did you ever read our Mark Twain?" she asks irrelevantly. "He is one of our humorous writers, and designates the expression your face assumes now as 'downright fetching.'"

He flushes slightly at her taunt, but hides whatever emotion he may feel in his laugh.

"But your perfect woman," he persists, her mood becoming contagious.

"She is not," she replies, "your friend, my cousin's wife, nor yet my sister, who, poor,

pretty little thing, is as open as a child to new impressions; nor yet am I, although," laughing, "perhaps I come nearer to it than the other two. My ideal woman, if you will have it, is a beautiful, high-minded, virtuous woman, — oh, but there are such, although the commodity is rare here in France, — a woman possessing all the impulses natural to the most womanly of her sex, with strength of character to control and direct her impulses; a good wife and a good mother, the friend and helpmate of her husband; not merely the woman of his lover days, but a friend, — the dearest friend he has on earth, — keeping his good name and honor intact, rearing his children in a healthy atmosphere of love and contentment. I have no high, inflated Joan of Arc ideas for my ideal woman. Marriage is a woman's vocation. The life of the women of the old Puritanical days, in the pursuit of their simple, primitive life, always seemed beautiful to me. In antithesis, put the woman of the highest so-called cultivation, and I think the result speaks for itself. See, here comes the antithesis of my woman now," as Céleste comes

down the stairs. "Well, my poor little Puritan does look a little dismal besides such dazzling beauty!"

Céleste, seeing them apart from the others, starts, hesitates, and then comes over and joins them, saying, with her sweetest smile:

"Fie, Kate! to take such an unfair advantage of us! We were taking our time at our toilets, easy in the consciousness that you were always the last to make your appearance, little divining that you were downstairs enslaving them all."

"You flatter me," answers Miss Langdon. "On the contrary, I have yet to see the first signs of such a condition shown by any one of them. And, as for Monsieur de Thysbaert, I have only been trying to persuade him that in my land we have no Guineveres. He is not as credulous, however, as I should like. Where is my sedate sister? If you will excuse me I will go seek her."

"What was she saying to you?" interrogates Céleste, after Kate has left them, at the same time raising her flower-like face for his accustomed caress.

"How indiscreet you are, Céleste!" he says, half proudly, half petulantly kissing her, while there comes to him the strong improbability of that fair, proud woman who has just left them ever offering her face for his kisses.

"But what was she saying, Henri? Tell me."

"Why, my darling, you surely do not expect me to remember all the Solon speeches of a blue-stocking like your respected cousin, do you?" he answers.

"Does she not tire you, though?" says Céleste, considerably mollified by his reply, "and yet my liege-lord speaks of her as one of the most brilliant women that he has ever met."

"Does the Platonic friendship between them still progress?" asks Henri.

"Oh, dear, yes," says Céleste, "all day long."

"He is not falling in love with her?" suggests De Thysbaert.

"Alas, no!" she answers, "and unfortunately she is not the kind to permit it. That girl is just the woman that, if she were ever to discover that she was becoming interested in any one, would be just idiotic enough to flee from temptation. Not that I believe that she

is so rigidly virtuous, but because she could never feel really strongly about anything. She is not a lovable nor a loving woman."

Pierrepont and the others join them, and a half-hour hence they are all in the midst of the dancers in the opening of the quadrille. As they had ascended the carpeted steps leading to the house, a poor, forlorn-looking creature, a woman, a mendicant, had spoken to them, probably asking for alms. But her words were lost in the gay laughter and the echo of the music coming through the open windows. She was passed by unheeded save by Kate.

"Did not that woman speak to us?" she finds opportunity to ask Pierrepont.

"I dare say," he answers, "but experience ought to have taught her that money is not often carried with evening dress."

"What a sharp contrast!" thinks the girl to herself, and several times during the evening the woman's haggard, abject face comes to her.

"Of what are you thinking?" asks one of her partners, a man famous for his wit and learning, and who had taken a strange fancy to her, warmly admiring her character.

"I was thinking just then, Monsieur," she answers, with her peculiar smile, "of that very commonplace maxim of Auerbach's that 'there are horses born for the cart, and horses born for the carriage,' and was wondering whether there are not some false external influences which have made the cart horse predominate. I mean that there seems so much more misery than happiness in the world; such a universal oligarchy!"

"Why these pessimistic views from you, of all others?" he says reprovingly. "Certainly no misery greets one here?"

Before she has time to tell him of the beggar woman and the impression she has made, some one comes to claim her attention.

To-night is a signal triumph for her. Céleste is consumed with jealous rage, which is increased by the necessity of hiding it. Pierrepont is quite elated over his cousin's triumphs; and whenever the crowd of men surrounding his wife gives him access to her, he whispers, "What a success she is!" And his wife smiles sweetly, and agrees with him, while she hates him for his stupidity in not

seeing that his words are distasteful to her. As for this woman with her overbearing pride and beauty, so like her own if not rivalling it, how she hates her! How she grudges her this homage and admiration from every side! She wishes that her mother had returned from the southern part of France, where she had gone for her health. Her mother could advise her how to precipitate this girl's return to America. What a fool she had been to send for them! What had their coming accomplished? Nothing, absolutely nothing, except annoyance. And Kate, with her insufferable airs of superiority! Only to-night had not Henri stopped to talk to her? Why had he not followed the others into the wine-room? What had he said to her? Céleste wonders if he had not perhaps been lying to her when he told her they had been discussing the dogmas of religion. "Dogmas of religion" with as pretty a woman as that! Faugh! And doubtless, with all her pretended saintliness, Kate Langdon was, after all, as fond of admiration as any woman.

"She shall pay for the anxiety that she has

caused me," determines Céleste. "I will marry Rose to somebody. That will make her furious, and probably touch her where nothing else would. As for Rose herself, she will eventually thank me for it. Then Miss 'Ice Deess' will become so indignant that she will take immediate departure for America."

Their coming had been the cause of a succession of vexations only. Love or become loved by Pierrepont! A likely probability that! How she had bungled! Her common sense might have shown her the futility of her mother's and her own plans. In reality, however, it was not so much the failure of being unable to carry out her designs in regard to her husband that piqued Céleste. It was the unpalatable morsel of Kate's increasing popularity which Céleste, voluntarily or involuntarily, was forced to accept. It was a fact that would accept no negation, and a fact for which she had only herself to blame. Now, at the acme of her popularity, she did not relish seeing her sceptre wrested from her. Where, she would like to know, was the great attraction about this woman? She acceded her some

beauty, but what was the magnet about a beauty forever denied? Was *Virtue* becoming no longer an indictable offence that all these fools and imbeciles of men should rave over her?

"Madame's thoughts are far away," ventures one of her servitors. "May I not share them?" She laughs sweetly at the discovery of her abstraction, saying: "I was only thinking of that whimsical thing, Human Nature. It is like a petulant, over-indulged child, crying one moment for the very thing that it rejects in scorn the next."

"Oh, yes," sighs her companion; "self-contradiction is the major evil that poor humanity has to contend with. Do you remember those lines in Schiller's 'Wallenstein,' where he says:

> 'It is the only wrong, for by the laws of spirit, in the right
> Is every individual's character that acts in strict consistence with itself'?"

"It is the acting 'consistently,'" she laughingly replies, "where I think the deficiency comes in, and perhaps, after all, the 'consist-

ency' would bore us dreadfully, and for past and renounced pleasures, 'being in the right' would but poorly compensate us. I question the wisdom of instilling impulses and desires in us merely for the motive of their repression; but this is hardly an opportune time for the discussion now probable. Tell me," abruptly, "do you find my cousin so marvellously beautiful?"

And he, being wise in his generation, and cognizant of the folly of praising one woman to another, replies:

"'Marvellously beautiful?' Well, those are strong adjectives. Beautiful? Yes, I suppose so, but some of our native beauty far exceeds hers;" and Céleste, although understanding the conservativeness of his speech, is withal a little pleased with it.

Give a woman the wisdom and penetration of Solomon, yet the *woman* in her never dies. Of admiration she is ever insatiable. Half the licentiousness and immorality of man has its origin in the *vanity* of woman.

CHAPTER IV

CÉLESTE made it a rule to be always among the last to arrive and the first to take her departure. In all little actions, as well as in great ones, she adhered to her theory that the less familiar you are with humanity, the more is it ready to accept your superiority. As you value yourself, so will the world value you.

As their party, with an additional number of the men, go down the steps, Kate casts her eyes right and left, half hoping to see the beggar woman whose face has haunted her all the evening. The men, noting her look of expectancy, and impatient of her inattention, draw their own inferences.

"For whom, think you, is she looking?" asks one of another.

The great eyes are full of anxious expression. Something which she cannot understand is

urging her to find the woman, and if possible to help her.

"Why do you delay?" calls Céleste, impatiently, as Miss Langdon stops, hesitating, on the last step.

"I am looking for some one," she answers coldly. "Drive on. I will take one of the other carriages," several being there for their many guests. With a shrug of acquiescence, and a slight curiosity as to what may be the motive for remaining, Céleste turns towards her carriage, saying to Henri and several others who are standing at the carriage door, "Come, my friends." Pierrepont, with Rose and some friends, has already taken one of the carriages. Several of the men who hope to go with Céleste are waiting to give Henri precedence, and then step in themselves.

Henri de Thysbaert stands irresolute for a moment. As sure as he is of the power he has over Céleste, he has never yet had the temerity to provoke her anger or displeasure; but the graceful figure standing on the steps in its white, clinging draperies has a strange fascination for him. She is so different from any

woman whom he has ever known. Because his gigantic wealth and personal appearance have made no impression on her, and because of her beauty, she is an attraction to him not to be resisted. He debates a moment longer as to the expediency of the rashness he contemplates, and hardly realizes his own courage when he says to Céleste :

"I will wait with your cousin. The men with her are only to-night's acquaintances. It will be better that I remain."

For an instant the expression of Céleste's face once seen would never be forgotten. It was a convulsion which, though short, beggared all description. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, and even the rouge could not hide the sudden pallor his words caused. But all that her companions hear is her musical laugh, and the pleasant words, "I wish that you would! and do, Henri, see that she is properly wrapped. Kate is so imprudent. See, the cloak is falling from her shoulders now." While she is thinking, in her rage and fury, "How dare he! how dare he! and *she*, the designing—"

"A Pythoness on her tripod," she says laughingly, calling the others' attention to the dramatic attitude of Kate; and the echo of her silvery laugh comes to her lover as he turns to mount the steps, and joins the only woman for whom he has ever felt the least respect. Those who had been *grande dames* in his world, whom his gold had not bought, had been won by his personal attractions, and his amorous intrigues and liaisons were among those the world recognized as the highest.

Crouched down under the steps, out of the glare of the gaslight, is a poor, forlorn-looking creature with a baby in her arms; a picture of misery, an old picture of sin and degradation in the world's history, but always pitiful and heart-rending in each fresh occurrence. One sees her like in all the large cities, where the poor and the rich, where misery and happiness are in such sharp contrasts. She, perhaps, is only one of the thousands of lost, shameless women who infest all great metropolises, and who "has had her day," contributing towards the propagation of sin and wrong; now, with her youth and beauty gone, in poverty and

"A Pythoness on her tripod," she says, laughingly

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want she is paying the price of her sin. She furtively watches the man ascending the steps, and draws her child closer to her. The air is as soft and mild to-night as in early spring, and Miss Langdon is heedless of the fact that her white *pelisse* is falling from her shoulders, and exposing her loveliness to the curious stars.

"I will go now; it is no use," she says half wearily. But as she steps down, a child's hushed sob reaches her. Turning instantly, her foot almost touches the woman, and the sad, miserable eyes that have been with her all the evening meet hers in reality. Divine pity and womanly instinct, that make women little more than mortal, suddenly possess her. Her quick eye has discovered the child. Bending low, while the jewels on her brow and bosom flash with their myriad lights, she says, in her soft, gentle voice, —

"What a sweet child!"

The woman, seeing that she is discovered, murmurs a half-sullen, defiant answer of some kind, and withdraws further into the shadow of the steps, away from the glare of the light.

"Come," said her companions to Miss Langdon, "pity is wasted here! Unless you have gold to give, your sympathy will not be wanted."

She makes them no answer, but advances a step nearer, saying, in a low tone, audible only to the woman:

"Can I not do something for you? If you will come to me to-morrow," giving her her address, "and if I can help you in any way, it will make me very happy. I am so fond of children! Will you bring the little one to see me? Let me look at him! How you must love him!"

And before the astonished, open-mouthed woman has time to realize it, her child is taken from her arms, and lies in those of this beautiful, divine creature, the child's rags in close contact with the costly laces and satin. The mother looks in speechless wonder at this strange apparition. No words come to her. Her eyes are glued on this woman who holds her baby, *her* baby in her arms. The old pride, almost dead within her, reasserts itself. She wants to speak, but the words seem to choke her. She can only look and look in speechless

amazement. She loved her baby, although its being had cost her a woman's all; but the sight of it, lying in this other woman's arms, seemed to awaken in her a love for it stronger and more intense than ever. The mother rose strong in her, conquering all other feelings.

"My baby! Give him to me," she cries, speaking for the first time.

"Yes, and such a dear little fellow as he is!" answers Kate, soothingly, putting him in his mother's arms. Her eyes are gleaming with a strange light, as she joyfully recognizes that the impulse that bade her take the child had been no false one.

"Will you come to me to-morrow, in the morning?" she asks, in persuasive tones. "Bring baby with you. I am all alone here—away from all I love, and I love little children. Here, take this wrap,—wrap baby up in it, and bring it back to me to-morrow. Now will you promise me to come?"

"Yes, I will come," says the woman, in a slow, half-dazed way.

Repeating the whispered admonition, "Take baby home now; the night air is cold," Miss

Langdon turns and joins the men, who begin quizzing and chaffing her considerably.

"The rôle of St. Ursula is vastly becoming to Miss Langdon. It is hoped that her efforts towards reformation met with success," suggests one.

"What prompted you to do that?" asks Henri, with unusual gravity, whose observation not the slightest incident of the episode had escaped. He was incapable of understanding the womanly, instinctive pity which had warmed the girl's heart towards the woman and her child.

Nevertheless, the *tableau* had been a very pretty and effective one. Nothing in a woman appeals so strongly to a Frenchman as the "perfection of grace," whether it be a natural or an acquired art.

"Come, come, gentlemen," she answers, in reply to their badinage, "can you not see that it was a prearranged *coup de théâtre* for your special edification? Doubtlessly I looked very well standing under the light in contrast with that poor, miserable woman."

"At any rate, she has mastered her rôle," says one of her first interrogators.

"Are you quite sure that you were a sympathizer of the genuine article?"

"My penetration is not generally at fault, Monsieur!" says Miss Langdon, adding laughingly, "and although the action may have been unconventional, I doubt if it ever would be as productive of as much censure as the fact that I am standing here with you men, without a chaperone or married woman in sight. I wonder which of the two facts would horrify your dear Paris more?"

"I am here," says Henri, in an undertone; "that is why I waited."

"And, oh! won't you have to pay for it?" she whispers back maliciously, her eyes dancing. He flushes at the innuendo, and never forgets it.

Arriving home, they find the rest of the party assembled in the hall awaiting them, Céleste looking the personification of amiability and good-humor. Rose is seated at the other end of the hall, talking to an old man, which fact sets Miss Langdon wondering at her sister's unusual generosity.

Pierrepont is quite relieved on their appear-

ance. He had been considerably annoyed when he had opened his wife's carriage to find that Kate was not with her, and perhaps for the first time in their married life, found his wife's judgment at fault. So well does he understand the imprudence of the action that he goes so far as to permit himself to say, "Céleste, you should have insisted on Kate accompanying you, as she is not so familiar with the customs of the country as you are."

Céleste says nothing, but makes a slight covert *moue*, and whispers to one of the men (Rumor's reputed possible successor to Henri), "What a fool he is! Fancy my insisting, *there!*"

"What delayed you?" asks Pierrepont, only half concealing his anxiety.

"A scene from Murillo," volunteers one. Then follows the story.

"Destroy about half the embellishment of that," says Miss Langdon, "then you will have a true version of the affair, which can be condensed into a very few words. I saw a beggar woman whose face interested me, and when I came out I offered her some assistance; that

is all. You French people have such a faculty for augmenting and enhancing events of trivial importance!"

Céleste salutes her husband's cousin most affectionately as they bid each other good-night, but the smiling, serene countenance undergoes a change when she reaches her own apartments, and Thérèse is honored with a recital of her mistress's wronged and outraged feelings, and De Thysbaert's shameful, bare-faced audacity. Céleste works herself up into such a state of excitement that Thérèse, accustomed to these things, foresees will make her mistress unpresentable for days unless summarily stopped.

"I told you, Madame," she is saying, with feminine logic, "that it was a mistake to send for them. Bah! Monsieur will never learn to love that piece of ice, with her black eyes that have no more love in them than a cat's! As for Monsieur Henri, I should think, Madame," cautiously, "that you were beginning to tire of him."

"But the absurdity, the inconceivability of it!" says Céleste. "What attraction is there

to him in a virtuous woman? To *him!*—Henri de Thysbaert! Oh, how Paris would screech over it if she knew! 'Your cousin is alone. I think it best that I wait.' He, Henri, having a regard for the proprieties! Oh, *mon Dieu!* If my rage had not choked me I could have screamed with the absurdity, the ridiculous absurdity of the thing But to think he dared," she continues, with renewed indignation, "to insult me there, before all those men, every one of whom knew, and he knowing that they knew it! And she! oh!" with suppressed passion and clinched hands. "If my fingers could have reached her throat I would have choked her, choked her until she was black in the face!"

"Calm yourself, Madame," says Thérèse. "This excitement is not good for you. There now remains only one thing to do. Get them back to America as soon as you can. Do not say much about it to Monsieur Pierrepont, only delicately hint your wishes to the ladies themselves. That one, with her pride, will not be long in understanding."

"Oh, it is not that!" says Céleste, scornfully. "What difference should their presence

make to me? It is the humiliation and the shame, the goading shame, that he dared, there, in the presence of them all, to mortify me by showing such a disregard and indifference, doing what he knew would be exactly contrary to my wishes!"

"Pardon me, but do you still love Monsieur Henri?"

"Oh, I don't know," answers Céleste. "I suppose that it is my pride as much as anything else that resents his insolence. How dared he!" angrily.

"See, Madame," says Thérèse, with animation; "you are a little tired of Henri, for Monsieur begins to show signs of disagreeableness, and you really have long since ceased to care for him, but, naturally, you are indignant at him, and feel that you owe it to yourself to get even with him. Well, then, Madame, you must be most kind, most amiable to him. Smile upon him, and tell him that although the love has died out of your heart for him, that friendship has taken its place. Speak of the beauty and purity of Mlle. Langdon. Tell him to go learn of her. Tell him to marry."

"That would be absurd, and only a futile waste of time," answers Céleste. "You mean to make him become interested in Kate, and then take my satisfaction in her rejection. That might work with the average man, but Henri is not that. There are too many women, beautiful, brilliant women, in this city to-day, only too anxious for his love."

"But you forget, Madame," says Thérèse, "for this very reason Mlle. Langdon's indifference has more attraction for him."

"Yes, I know," says Céleste. "The theory, I know, is a good one generally, but Henri is different; and although he might for a time, it would be a very short time that he would play Lancelot to any woman, when there were thousands of others fairer than the queen waiting only for a sign from him."

"Still I think, Madame," says Thérèse, "that you will find some reason in what I say."

"I may use some of your suggestions," says Céleste, who has regained some of her wonted calm. "I shall have no scene with him, as I suppose I should have been idiotic enough to have had, had an opportunity left us alone to-

night. Men generally care for what they think they have lost past redemption. Perhaps I shall be able to make him unhappy, and revive his interest. Perhaps! I admit that I do not like that the first signs of indifference should have come from him. In a friendship such as ours has been, it is wise for the woman to tire first. He has tired, but this admission itself shall cost him dear. I shall try to incite him as I never have before, and awaken in him all his brutal passions, only to deny him. For the insult he offered me to-night I will make him a second Sisyphus. He shall believe that I am the one desirable thing on earth. I will make him forget that he has ever seen another woman worth possessing. Then when he is mine, wholly mine again, I shall snap my fingers in his face and say, 'You see, my friend, two can play at that. Now you go to the — !'"

"You know best perhaps, Madame," assents Thérèse, "but I think that Mlle. Langdon is a more important card in the game than you think."

"Perhaps," says her mistress; but she does not lay much stress on the words.

After Thérèse has completed her mistress's toilet, as she goes out the door she half turns, saying ominously: "Ice, as Monsieur Henri says, must melt. Look to Mlle. Langdon. Monsieur may never become enamoured, Mademoiselle may! A good night, Madame."

"For surely," Thérèse thought to herself (whose love affairs, if possible, had even exceeded her mistress's), "a woman must love once in her life, and although Monsieur is blind, blind as a bat, still he is *un beau garçon*, and Mlle. Langdon, alas! only a woman! True, she is not Monsieur's style. The man who would love Madame would never fancy the other."

Thérèse forgets that it is the ideal, not the actual Céleste, who inspires such unstinted reverence and love in her husband.

About the same time that Céleste and her maid are having their confidences, Miss Langdon is telling Brooks about the beggar woman.

"A beggar woman, Miss Kate!" said Brooks, if respectfully still a little amazed.

"Yes," answers Kate; "I am not sure whether she asked for alms or not. She cer-

tainly said something. Well, all through the evening I could think of nothing but her face. I do not know when I had been so impressed with anything, and I agreed to myself that there must be some omen, either for evil or good, in the pertinacious reminder of her misery there in that brilliant ball-room. It struck me with sudden, compunctory force how little, how very little I had ever done to alleviate the misery that so predominates in this world; how little I had ever done in return for all I had had done for me. Indeed, Brooks," earnestly, "I think that many a noble action, many a good deed, is lost in this incessant rotation of fashionable life. We form good resolutions, sincere in our intentions of fulfilling them, when, lo! some new call or demand of our world prevents, oftentimes forever, the bearing of fruit of our first impulses. But about the woman. She has promised to come to me to-morrow, and I think that she will. Oh, Brooks, whatever her misery may be, I am convinced that she is no sinful, no depraved woman. Her love for her child assured me of that. I suppose it is only another example of the old, old story, —

man's deception and woman's credulity! But there was no viciousness in her face, only sorrow. I suddenly determined then and there that I, who had done so little for others, would try here, and perhaps would be able to make one woman happier, or at least less miserable. She said that she would be at the eastern gate to-morrow. You must meet her there, and, Brooks, you and I will do all we can for her."

"Yes, Miss Kate, but," mildly suggests Brooks, who is naturally of rather a conservative turn of mind, "maybe, after all, she is one of those women you should not even speak to."

"No, I am convinced that she is not," said Miss Langdon.

"Very well, I will bring her, Miss Kate," assents Brooks, who, although she relies implicitly on her mistress's judgment, knowing that it is rarely based on impulse alone, is not without some foreboding concerning the wisdom of picking up and befriending promiscuous female beggars originating from house-steps.

"Has Rose gone to bed, Brooks?" asks Miss Langdon.

"Yes, Miss," answers Brooks; "she wanted to come in, but I knew that you would be tired, and when she asked what kind of a humor you were in, I did not want you disturbed, so I said, 'Oh, she has been laughing at everybody and everything,' and with that Miss Rose jumped in bed, saying, 'Well, I don't want to be laughed at to-night. I will wait and tell her to-morrow.'"

"I wonder what she has to tell me," thinks Kate, and then says aloud, "I wonder, Brooks, what there is so formidable about my laughing that seems to intimidate every one?"

"Some people it does not, or does not seem to," says Brooks, sententiously.

"Who?" said her mistress, wonderingly, amazed at the gravity of Brooks's face.

"Miss Kate," continues Brooks, "I have been with you since you were a wee mite of a baby, and surely I have a right to speak, have I not?"

"Certainly you have, Brooks," says Miss Langdon, smiling. "Well," hesitatingly from Brooks, "you spend all your mornings, Miss Kate, in the study — now, don't you?"

"Most of them," answers Miss Langdon; "but what can that have to do with your question?"

Brooks had flattered herself that she had approached the subject with much tact, but seeing that disguise is at an end now, says, in her abrupt way, not without some suppressed excitement, "Now, Miss Kate, I will be plain, and say just what I mean."

"But don't look so tragical over it," says her mistress.

"Miss Kate," says Brooks, abruptly, "your cousin is a fine man?"

"Pierrepont? Oh, yes," answers Miss Langdon.

"I dare say that he knows a good deal," continues Brooks.

"Yes, Brooks, a good deal," laughs Miss Langdon.

"You are his own cousin now, are n't you?" goes on Brooks.

"Yes," says Kate, submitting good-naturedly to this catechism, which she certainly fails to understand.

"But is it right, Miss Kate, for you to spend

so much time alone with him?" ventures Brooks. "I cannot understand their gibberish," meaning the other French domestics of the house, "but, if I can't talk, I can see, and when that English gentleman was staying here, what do you think? Now, Miss Kate, don't get angry with me, but what do you think his man said? He said to me, 'Madame and Monsieur (meaning *him* and *her*), know how to enjoy life, and don't interfere with one another, but I think Monsieur shows better taste than Madame in his selection of a friend, eh?" I did not understand what he meant, and then he told me that all those grinning, gibbering apes said that the master was in love with you the same as Madame and Monsieur Henri. Angry! Miss Kate, I was that angry I could not hold myself in a minute longer, and I just went down there in their hall and, if I did not give them one and all a piece of my mind! Coming to recollect afterwards, I knew that they did not understand a word; but it was n't my fault if they did not."

"Brooks, I am surprised at your noticing servants' gossip," says her mistress, laughing;

but she has turned slightly pale, for all that, and Brooks's words have certainly made an impression.. Was there, then, nowhere in this land where one's actions were free of misconstruction? Had others, as well as the servants, seen and commented on this voluntary little action of kindness in assisting her cousin with his work? A fierce indignation swells within her as she feels the base injustice of the accusation; for, after all, servants' voices are but the echoes of their masters — they only repeat what they hear. Had she really been imprudent in attracting comment? Surely, the ties of relationship alone should have protected her from all gossip. After Brooks has left her, for the first time she feels that she would rather welcome a return home. "A proper appreciation of the complexity of these Gallic morals is too much for me," she tells herself, half amused, half annoyed.

The following morning, Pierrepont finds that it is necessary for him to be absent during the hours allotted for the morning work, and tells his wife, as he leaves her dressing-room, to let Kate know of it; which she does, as she and

Rose are on their way to the carriage. Miss Langdon is decidedly pleased, as it will do away with the necessity of leaving the work an hour earlier in order to keep her engagement with the woman of last night's episode. Several hours, however, must intervene before she will arrive.

Evidently Miss Langdon, with the exception of the servants, is the sole occupant of the house. She takes her book and goes to the library, thinking that she will read for a few hours unmolested. She has hardly been seated five minutes before one of the servants brings her Henri de Thysbaert's card.

"There is some mistake," she says, handing it back. "This is intended for Madame. Say to the gentleman that she is not within."

"But, no, Monsieur desires to see Mlle. Langdon, or any of the ladies who are at home."

"Flattering impartiality," she thinks dryly to herself, and says to the servant, "Well, admit him here," while she wonders "What outrage to '*les convenances*' am I committing now?"

When Henri de Thysbaert softly opens the door there is a look of almost triumph in his handsome face as he advances, bowing profoundly.

"Mlle. Langdon is most kind, most unexpectedly kind," he says, in his soft, well-modulated voice.

"Pray in what way, Monsieur?" she asks pleasantly, ignoring his proffered hand. "The man said that you wanted to see me, and I told him that you would find me here. Oh," with sudden inspiration, "perhaps it is not good form here to receive a gentleman alone; but, pardon me, I forget. If it were not, you would not be here. You will find that large chair more comfortable. My cousin's wife doubtlessly will be home shortly. What was I reading so intently when you came in? Nothing less than Dante's Inferno, and I have never come so near being convinced that there was an excuse for Beatrice than to-day. Gemma, his wife, *was* such a virago! I can understand such a woman driving any man to raising an ideal. If you remember, one of the characters is made to say,

'La fiera imoglie più ch' altro mi nuoce'

('Me, my wife of savage temper more than aught beside
Hath to this evil brought me.')

Perhaps in this case we owe to her ill-humor some of the sublime productions of the great poet. Generally, though, it is not followed by any such happy results, and towards the end we only turn and look back over a long stretch of useless years, filled with contention, dissatisfaction, and unhealthy retrospection," she continues, talking with the intention of making the interview, while it lasted, as impersonal as possible. The man is in no way congenial to her, and she chafes at his presence, knowing him to be Céleste's lover. He answers her opinions, but it is apparent that the subject is altogether too impersonal for his taste. Finally, some speech of hers gives him the opportunity he has been seeking for, to put to her the query:

"And shall you always, do you think, be so indifferent to the loves of men? Have you forgotten the prophecy of Hermes, that 'God made no woman without love'?"

"Oh, they were all false gods," she says

lightly, "whose doctrines have been effaced by the newer ones. Conventionality is the modern Jove of all modern Olympuses."

"But," he asks, "what shall your future, what shall any woman's future be, if she exclude forever the soft whispers of the boy god?"

"It depends altogether on the woman," says Miss Langdon, with a gesture of weariness. "But see, Monsieur, the absurdity of our continuing such a conversation as this threatens to be. I am offering no personal simile, — but what possible realization in common can the caged sparrow have with the free one?"

"You mean to imply—" he suggests.

"I mean to imply nothing whatever," she answers; "the subject tires me. Change it. Tell me, rather, of the susceptibility of that pretty little English girl, from whom they say your appearance called forth, before an introduction, the flattering commentary, 'What a handsome fellow! See, mother! I must have him, too, to pay me attention.'"

"You are pleased to jest," he says, slightly

annoyed at her tone, but fully alive to the consummate beauty of the woman.

"Not at all," she laughs, "but I was thinking how wonderfully well it 'paid,' as we Americans say, to be notorious."

"You are a queer combination," he says, looking at her steadily. "I do not, cannot understand you."

"What a habit of repetition you have, have you not?" she replies. "Our acquaintance, true, has been a very limited one, but I cannot recall one interview in which you have not expressed the opinion that I am either 'enigmatical' or 'not to be understood.' It grows monotonous."

"You puzzle me strangely," he says. "You do more," he adds gravely; "you almost restore to me a faith in the chastity and virtue of women, which my life has seemingly proved to be a figment."

"You have been unfortunate," she says coldly, "and I dislike to hear such views coming from any man, no matter what may be his actual beliefs. With Rochefoucauld I believe, though, that among your people depravity and

immorality are yearly on the increase; but there are men and women in the world fully worth the appellation of men and women. I am a strong advocate," growing more and more earnest, "of the days of old, when the betrayal of a friend's trust, or the destroyer of his domestic peace, was rewarded by a death-blow."

"You are an *enthusiaste*," he says, purposely misinterpreting her.

"No, only a good actress," she says, resuming her ordinary tone, and surprised and annoyed at herself for this outburst of feeling. Why should she seek to reproach this man? If she so resented his relations to Céleste, why remain longer here, countenancing that which she knew to be so wrong? She would speak to Rose to-morrow, and if possible hasten their departure from France. It was no fit school for Rose, this false, fascinating, corruptive Paris.

"Miss Kate? She is here," says Brooks, opening the door, thinking that her mistress is alone; but, seeing to the contrary, she retires in confusion.

"You will excuse me?" says Miss Langdon, rising and making no pretence to disguise the relief that she feels. "I must go. If you care to stay, doubtlessly Céleste will not be long now."

"And you?" he asks. Strange possibilities is the presence of this woman conjuring up for him.

"Oh, I!" she says laughingly. She has reached the door, and turns to give this parting shaft, "Oh, I shall be better occupied than entertaining other women's admirers, in which admiration I see much to condemn and nothing to commend."

Céleste, coming in later, finds the library unoccupied, and Rose, going to her sister's room, seems relieved to find her on her bed, sleeping.

"I will tell her before we go down to dinner," she says, with a long-drawn sigh. Her pretty face wears a look of anxiety foreign to its usual brightness. Brooks watches her as she puts the finishing touches to her toilet, but says nothing. She sees that something is worrying "the child," but, feeling conscious

that she perhaps would be unable to give the best advice, even if appealed to, refrains from questioning.

Rose goes to Miss Langdon's room about an hour before the time they are accustomed to descend, and hardly knows whether the feeling she experiences is one of regret or relief when Brooks tells her again that Kate is downstairs.

Henri, with several others, is dining with them, and, as usual, is seated on the right hand of his hostess. He had been a little surprised at her cordial, pleasant reception to him. He had at least expected some little remonstrance on her part for his conduct of the night previous. This smiling, friendly aspect of affairs decidedly put to flight the elaborate defence that he had prepared for the anticipated reproaches of his lady-love. Man of the world, and accustomed as he was to the fluctuations of the female mind, Céleste's course of action rather puzzled him. Could it be possible that she was learning to cease to care, and that her present amiability was only the offspring of an indifference that

was too genuine even to feign solicitude where there was none felt. Momentary as these thoughts were, still they occurred to him. Could Céleste have divined them, she would have triumphantly scored one in her success. "*Ma belle* is altogether too sure of her powers," he is thinking to himself; man-like, half angry that the tirade of abuse expected had not been forthcoming.

This indifference of Céleste was a new rôle for her, and manifestly not an acceptable one to his self-love. He gives it considerable thought, but finally concludes: "Ah, my dear, I think that I see your little game, and will punish you for it. I will make love to my beautiful icicle in reality. Your temper, *ma mignonne*, is getting vile; and I know now that this pretty show of amiability is only the lull before the storm. These things, too, must end sometime. But, God! you *are* beautiful," he thinks, as she turns at this moment her *riante*, lovely face towards him, calling his attention to some remark that had just been made. It is with almost a renewed feeling of gratified pride that he thinks of her posses-

sion, and the envy of half the men in Paris at his success. Then the woman at the other end of the table, with her pale face void of rouge, and her starry eyes gleaming, makes some *bon mot* in her cool, *nonchalant* way, which instantly convulses them all with laughter. He suddenly falls to comparing them, and Céleste, noticing his preoccupation, is saying to herself, "Ah, ha, my dear! You are already beginning to repent. Wait! You have but just begun your penance." In reality his thoughts are far from those she credits him with. He is wondering whether it is indeed possible that this girl, with her proud disdain of him, is not to be won? Because of what his life had been, and the indulgence of Fate to him in all things, he tells himself that it is only a question of time. Had not the whole world of women taught him the power that lay in the glance of his eye, and in his protestations of love? True, a man's taste must indeed be critical, to demand more beauty than that possessed in the face and form of Céleste. But then, again, satiety is possible with a Helen. He had loved Céleste, certainly, but

he had loved hundreds of others perhaps as well. Her power had lasted longer, and had been stronger over him than many of her predecessors. *She* had loved him less, and therefore retained him longer. I may be accused of tautology and triteness, but oh, ladies, one and all, take this advice well to heart:

Love your husbands, if you will, as much as you choose. Remain true to them and your marriage vows. Lead an unblemished life of purity. Let their interests be your interests, their joys and sorrows your joys and sorrows. But, if you would be happy, bear in mind this one thing: Never let the man with whom you have joined your life become too well aware of the love you bear him.

Your husband may be all that is noble, honorable, and lovable, in a man; but he is a man for all that, and this fact you must not forget. He is a man, and amenable to all the weaknesses of a man. He is no more responsible for the inconsistencies of his nature, than an unborn child is for the pain it unconsciously causes its mother. Nevertheless, the inconsistencies do exist. Some power unknown to

us has made it thus with mankind to cease to value the certainties of life. Meanwhile, Henri de Thysbaert is debating in his mind the divers modes of possibly winning this proud woman's fancy, who never seemed fairer to him than she does to-night. Rarely is natural beauty really beautiful by gaslight. It is indeed a foolish, as well as a brave woman, who dares expose herself "naturally" to the many unflattering lights of the ball-room. Rouge and cosmetics are as essential to the ball-room as rain is to the perfection of the flowers of the field. No woman, no matter how fine or how dazzling a complexion she may possess, will look otherwise than ghastly in the light of electricity. Many a woman, acting from scruples against using rouge, makes a guy of herself, and is foolishly happy in the consciousness that she is "perfectly natural."

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no color in Miss Langdon's face, perhaps it is in her the exception that proves the rule just recorded. Her style and stature were all conformable to the absence of color. Her clas-

sical regularity of features seemed rather to demand this pallor than bewail its absence. Be it as it was, Henri de Thysbaert thought that he had never before seen a woman reaching nearer to his idealization of the beautiful. Céleste was beautiful, but he recognized in some strange, undefined way that there was a something lacking in her beauty which this other woman possessed. Possibly, though, it always is as Châteaubriand says: "*La nouvelle caprice est toujours la plus forte.*" As he meets the luminous eyes of the woman, he suddenly, vehemently feels that there *is* no other woman in the world worth possessing. Céleste is as much at sea in regard to this mood as he was to hers a few moments ago. She watches him furtively from out one eye, while she chatters and smiles at the man on her left, another admirer of hers, "after Henri."

A few months ago this divertisement of Céleste's would have been the cause of a warm and interesting scene, for Henri de Thysbaert was not the man to brook a division in his love affairs. But now he is so engrossed with his new caprice, that half of Céleste's manœuvres

are wasted. As they rise to leave the table he, as usual, offers his arm to Céleste, which she, as usual, accepts, making some half-mocking, half-teasing speech about his abstraction during dinner. "But, *ma belle*," he whispers, with the smile Céleste is not pleased to see, "what would you have? Rito was the recipient of all your smiles, and what remained for me to do except to sulk in jealous silence?"

Céleste raises her head, and looks at him. If he spoke thus, how useless indeed had been her attempts to provoke his jealousy.

"How lovely Kate is looking to-night!" she says, determining to find out whether her worst surmises have been correct. If he were warmly to assent, well; if he were to dissent, well. She would then know by the evasion that he really was becoming interested in this woman.

"Oh, I do not know," he says indifferently, with a shrug of his shoulders. "We men have not the faculty of seeing your sex as you see one another."

Céleste is answered, — disagreeably, unacceptedly answered.

Rose is very taciturn to-night, and although several men are trying to amuse her, or to be amused by her, she seems absorbed, and every now and then looks over to where her sister is sitting with Pierrepont and De Thysbaert. Céleste, who does nothing by halves, and who cannot yet believe that Henri is other than the devoted lover he has been for months past, has gone with Rito into the conservatory of roses for a *tête-à-tête*. She hopes that each moment will be a period of jealous agony to Henri, who has seen her intention, and, alas! is only amused by it. The breaking of all these friendships of his were so monotonously, so horribly monotonously alike. He knew it like some drama, oft rehearsed. He could foretell every action, every word. If it were not reproaches, then it was like this, — an attempt to arouse his jealousy, where there remained no jealousy to arouse.

"What makes you and Henri such ardent friends?" Pierrepont asks jokingly, as Miss Langdon makes rather a caustic reply to some remark of De Thysbaert's.

She laughs as she replies: "I am sure I

cannot tell, but Monsieur de Thysbaert's presence always seems an incentive to me to be malicious. I really fear," turning to him frankly, "that I am very rude to you at times. It certainly is not because I have any great antipathy for you."

"No; we never hate any one unless we first have liked them," says Pierrepont, with an ignoble effort to embarrass her.

"You are quite right," she answers coolly and unabashed, apparently unconscious that she has said anything rude. Both men laugh.

"Miss Langdon can be very severe when she likes," says De Thysbaert.

"But, on the contrary, I have no wish to be disagreeable," she replies. "At times I even sacrifice truth in my efforts towards amiability. My moods, however, depend as much as anything on my surroundings."

"We are 'the surroundings' just at present, De Thysbaert," says Pierrepont, "and you can judge by my lady's prior speech whether we are agreeable ones."

"Oh, I have been bored more," she replies, smiling, and determined not to be teased.

"Both of you at times can make yourselves very agreeable, and I have heard you both 'get off' some very good things. 'Get off' is American for 'to be witty,'" she explains.

"Thank you. Now, is it?" says Pierrepont, with mock gratitude. "I should like very much to say the same thing about you, but — but —"

"You have too much regard for veracity," she answers, smiling. "But how trite you are! Your vocabulary seems very limited."

"Behold me subsided," says Pierrepont.

"Does this exchange of wit go on constantly between you?" asks De Thysbaert.

"Oh, no," she replies. "We are as sedate as can be. All our time is devoted exclusively to researches in the dead languages; and now that this age is becoming the millennium of black letter, old ballads, old plays, and old women's stories, we eschew anything like modernity, and we verily breathe an atmospheric mediævality."

"Who does the writing, and who does the dictation?" Manifestly Henri is interested in the subject.

"Oh, we share it," she replies.

"But, Pierrepont," suggests De Thysbaert, "what danger and temptation in such close proximity of two kindred souls! I am confident that I should forget the past in the ecstasy of the present."

"No," says Miss Langdon, "there is no danger of the occurrence of what your words imply. My cousin is too much in love with his wife, and I with myself, for the possibility of such a thing."

"A decided case of Platonism, then?" says De Thysbaert, not without some dryness in his tone.

"Platonism?" answers Miss Langdon, argumentatively, and a little surprised at the feeling he is showing. "Platonism? No. To me that is one of the most flagrant fallacies of the human ken. There is no such thing, and it were folly for any man or woman to deceive himself or herself with any such belief. Do not mistake me. There may be a friendship, but what the world, your world, has accepted as Platonism is perilously near to what you call love. As for my cousin here, at times I find

him quite intelligent. Many subjects that interest me interest him. I have not questioned the propriety, or good form, or what the opinion of outsiders may be in regard to my giving him so much of my valuable time, and exposing him to the dangerous fascination of my beauty and mind. However, I am of the opinion that he is both physically and mentally sufficiently robust to withstand the pressure brought to play upon him. Not that I underrate my attractions; but he is so thoroughly *en consonnance* with his name, 'Joseph,'" she laughs, adding, "the combined efforts of all the Mrs. Potiphars of the universe would be unavailing with him. I do not think that this cousin of mine is a Saint Anthony, by any means. He is simply that nineteenth century phenomenon, — a man in love with his own wife."

"And you find his constancy so commendable?" asks De Thysbaert. His eyes, as he gazes on her flushed beauty, are filled with passionate admiration.

"Yes, unquestionably, considering the circumstances," she says, in an aside, meeting his eyes with her own honest, fearless ones. Then

she says aloud, with the little laugh for which, once having known her, one always listened: "Yes, undoubtedly commendable. I am still sufficiently primitive as to retain my faith in loyalty between man and wife. I dare say that it is contrary to all the Philistinic laws of the present state of society. Still, it seems to me that the relationship of marriage is, and should be, a sacred and binding institution. There is no compulsory law forcing one to enter into such a contract involuntarily, but when once entered, I think both the man and the woman ought to keep and guard it sacredly." She suddenly discovers how much feeling her speech is betraying, and, as is her wont when such is the case, as quickly concludes her sentence with a jest. "Do you think that my eloquence will be successful in a reformation here?" indicating Henri, and addressing Pierrepont. "My style of oratory, as I heard Brooks once telling Rose, could n't be beat in all America."

"Are you ever serious for five consecutive moments?" asks Henri de Thysbaert; "is there ever a time when you forget yourself quite, and cease to analyze, lose yourself in an outburst

of impulse or emotion without as sudden a recall?"

Pierrepont bursts out into a suppressed guffaw of amusement, and calls to Céleste, who is coming towards them from the conservatory:

"Come here, dear, and hear *ce cher* Henri philosophizing with our 'priestess of Delphi!'"

Céleste wears her sweetest smile as she answers her husband's call, and readily joins in the laugh against Henri's gravity.

"And what does the oracle say for him?" she asks pleasantly, stopping for a moment only. "Oh, it is for the future," answers her husband, "and I fear will have a tendency to confirm De Thysbaert's views of celibacy, as constancy, and a monopoly of his love, are the requisite demands. The High Priestess emphatically declares that there is no alternative, — either complete surrender or unquestionable misery!"

"I do not know that my words were intended particularly for Monsieur de Thysbaert," says Miss Langdon, coolly. "I am like a missionary in Africa I once heard of. When advised to go further into the interior to begin his conver-

sions, he said that he preferred rather to begin with those who had already received the first words of religion, believing that they would be more tractable, and more likely to do him credit."

"You mean by that," says De Thysbaert, "that you class me in the category of the few you mentioned who had reached the zenith of depravity?"

"Do you mean nadir?" she suggests maliciously, and adds, laughingly, "If you really are anxious for my opinion of you, insist upon it, well, I will then have to admit that I believe that I have seen better men. I beg your pardon, Monsieur de Thysbaert," she says suddenly; "I am very disagreeable, — ill-bred, I fear!"

"It will not hurt him, it will not hurt him," says Pierrepont, reassuringly, who rather enjoys his friend's discomfiture. "De Thysbaert can stand antidotally many such applications."

"I am not sure," says De Thysbaert, apparently unaffected, "that I would not prefer your abuse to the admiration of all other women living."

"Rather inflated," comments Miss Langdon;

"but, as the sincerity is so apparent, we can forgive the inflation."

"But believe me," he says earnestly.

"What an exceptionable woman I should be if I did not," she laughs.

"Which you are," he says hastily; "but I will tell you why your animosity does not precipitate me in misery. Simply because it, in itself, is a proof to me that if you were perfectly indifferent, this same animosity could not exist!"

"Quite logical, Monsieur," she assents, "but it is ungenerous of you, to say the least, ruthlessly to unveil the fact of my growing admiration for you, which has taken Herculean effort on my part to disguise, and — "

"I have heard," says Pierrepont, irrelevantly, "that whenever two persons of the opposite sex begin by contending, they invariably — invariably — "

"What a facility of speech he has! Hear him stammer," remarks Miss Langdon.

"— invariably end in falling in love with one another," finishes Pierrepont, imperturbably.

"I do not think that Miss Langdon is a

woman calculated to fall in love with any one," says De Thysbaert.

"No," she laughs; "I was long ago convinced that my ideal could never be human."

"Yes," he says, remembering the conversation on the subject he had had with her on a former occasion, "and it would be useless for the present order of humanity ever to aspire to reach its heights."

"Come, De Thysbaert," says Pierrepont; "I hope that you have no presumptuous ideas of ever reaching the summit?"

"My summits, as a rule," answers De Thysbaert, not without a little pointedness in his tone, "have not been inaccessible."

"You forget, my dear cousin," Miss Langdon says, in her cool, satirical tones, "that you are speaking to the darling of Paris, the Jason of the Golden Fleece, unto whom all things are possible."

"I should be the happiest of men if I thought you would ever come to believe that," he says, not ungracefully, and half wonders himself at the fascination this girl's words and opinions possess for him.

"Pray, Monsieur," she answers, "let me be no impediment towards your arriving at a satisfactory opinion of yourself. I assure you that your modesty is charmingly refreshing in comparison to the prevalent egotism one meets at every turn."

"It is a merciful Providence, and a good Maker, that have given you beauty, Kate," interrupts Pierrepont; "otherwise there would be nothing left you but isolation."

She laughs unconcernedly, saying: "You people here have a most persistent way of reminding one of one's faults. Fortunately I am not sensitive to criticism. If I were, I should have been worn away with anxiety to a shadow long ago. There *is* one person, however," she says gravely, her great eyes serious in expression, "whom I want always to think well of me, whose opinion I value above everything. When that person despises me, life will have ceased to have any attraction for me."

"Why, pray who is it?" says Pierrepont, decidedly surprised at her declaration, and very serious manner.

"Yes, who is the man whom you are declaring you love?" asks De Thysbaert, now accounting for her indifference, which had become the talk of all Paris.

"A brilliant intellect," she continues, in a low tone of enthusiasm, "physically perfect."

"Spare us the histrionics," says Pierrepont, "and tell us the fellow's name," adding, "Well, this is certainly a revelation. Now we understand why poor Trevwaithe and his millions got his *congé*."

"You will admit now," says De Thysbaert, eying her steadily, "that Hermes' prophecy is not without its fulfilment."

"The fine expression of the eyes," she continues, in a soft ecstasy of tone, "the erect, stately figure, the contour of the fine, shapely head, the magnificent shoulders (mind, I am quoting) — was there, I wonder, ever any one nearer perfection!"

"And he is?" says De Thysbaert, somewhat impatiently, amazed and astounded at the unlooked-for excess of feeling that this cold, proud girl was capable of showing. "Ice Deess" perhaps had been a misnomer after

all, and he envied again the man who could stir and move her thus.

"Will you tell us who he is? *An American?*" he asks again.

"He?" she says, contemptuously. "I should think you would know by the description. It does not do the subject half justice. Why, it is I, myself, of course —"

"Oh, oh!" groans Pierrepont, "and it is on such things as that that she gets her reputation for wit!"

"I believe that I am exhausted now," she says, rising and smiling; "you both have ceased to amuse me, or I to be amusing. Let us join the others."

"Your delicacy of innuendo is perfect, Miss Langdon," says her cousin, sarcastically, "and your dismissal most explicit. Fortunately the consolation of the smoking-room is still left us. Will you come, De Thysbaert?"

"May I ask what your intentions are before replying?" says Henri to Kate.

"Philanthropical," she replies. "Just now I was thinking of going over to Rose's rescue, divining that you both would want your smoke."

"Thank you," answers De Thysbaert, "but does that necessarily imply a dismissal?"

"Certainly not," she replies, trying to hide the fact that she is bored. "If you do me the honor to prefer my company to your cigar, I must of necessity feel flattered."

"Shall we sit down here, or would you rather go into the conservatory?" he asks.

"That manœuvre for a *tête-à-tête* is altogether too transparent, De Thysbaert," says Pierrepont, as he passes them on his way to the smoking-room; "and I am involuntarily obliged to believe that it was premeditated."

"As you like," Miss Langdon answers Henri, seeing no chance of escape, and conscious that her past rudeness owed him some reparation.

Together they pass through the *portières* into the flower-scented air of the conservatory. He watches her intently as she walks, and notes the grace of every movement of her majestic young figure. She was an intense attraction to him. Her sensual indifference to love, he only half believes in. His experience had been so great among women of all kinds,

that he was skeptical of any such indifference as she professed to exist in *any* woman. Her coldness and her extreme beauty from the first had made their impression, and, as I said, because the concession of all women had been such a natural thing to him, he hardly realized what negation meant. He had even gone so far as to conceive of her in the light of his mistress, and it was not until later, when he had been made surprised and consciously alive to the futility of the accomplishment of such a plan, that he came to the final conclusion that the possession of her was worth the legality of his name. He, who had laughed and mocked at the ordinance of marriage, and thought his compatriots fools when they embraced it! He had despised, sneered, and scoffed at Pierrepont himself, only to sneer, scoff, and despise more when Céleste became his mistress. He knew the ethics and morals of his country too well, he used to say, "to increase the number of received courtesans, or contribute diamonds and establishments to other men's mistresses."

For philosophy, so far, so good. He was a man of the strongest animal passions, and be-

cause this new toy, which his eye had chanced to fall upon, refused immediate appropriation, so much accordingly did its value increase in his eyes. He was conscious of the absurd incongruity of marriage in connection with himself. He was mentally amused at the intense excitement and sensation that such a move on his part would cause in Paris. He even thought of Céleste, of the pique and anger she would feel. How she would have to smile and swallow it, and hold her tongue, and kiss his wife on the cheek, and congratulate him, while in her heart she would be heaving the bitterest curses that ever woman wished on man. The whole thing would be vastly amusing. How he would teach this beautiful cold child how to love! He felt that he knew human nature too well not to know that satiety would be inevitable with his marriage, as it had always been with his love affairs, but, after some debating, concluded that the article was worth the price asked. Virtue is always above par in France. The possibility never occurs to him that an offer of marriage from him would, could ever meet with a refusal.

Not that Henri de Thysbaert was by any means a fool, but all things previously had "been possible unto him." Consequently the more repellent and openly rude, as she was at times, the more he thought to himself, "All this will be changed." This premeditated offer of marriage represented to him his acceptation, the marriage itself; in fact, everything in regard to it. It seemed to him that the offer, in itself alone, bound her to a grateful, and certainly an unconditional acceptance.

"I believe that he is actually going to make love to me," she thinks, with that intuitive perception that rarely fails her, as she notices how intently he is regarding her.

She has seated herself on one of the low chairs, hence making it impossible for him to seat himself next to her.

"You are very cruel," he says.

"Why?" she replies, with her little smile of derision. "Did you really attach so much importance to my preferring this chair to the one you pushed towards me?"

"Is there never a time," he replies, "when your eyes have not that gleam of mockery in

them? Are they never soft and sweet like other women's? I should like to see them so."

Henri's manner is not bad, and his voice euphoniously soft.

"You are not pleased to be complimentary, Monsieur," she says indifferently.

"On the contrary —" he begins.

"I hate 'on the contraries,'" she interrupts, "and even when I may be wrong in judgment and opinion, I dislike exceedingly to admit it; which argument sometimes makes compulsory. Is this Monsieur Rito a friend of yours?" she asks abruptly.

"No," he answers, "rather a friend of Madame Pierrepont's."

"Ah!" from her.

"Why do you not like Céleste?" he asks, equally abruptly.

"What gave you that opinion?" she replies.

"Which means that you prefer not answering my question," he says.

"Your penetration is wonderful!" she rejoins, adding, "My sister and my cousin's wife are the very best of friends."

"Your sister is probably more like her in disposition," he says.

"I fervently hope not," she replies.

"I shall not ask why," he says, "because I know that I should not be answered," adding, "I suppose your blessing has been asked on the future nuptials."

"What nuptials?" she asks.

Although seeing that he has made a mistake, but encouraged by the interest shown, he proceeds to tell of Céleste's plans in regard to a marriage for Rose. The girl listens with the fiercest indignation in her heart. This woman, then, was not content with creating misery in her own home, but must corrupt the heart and morals of this baby sister of hers, who was but a child in experience and feelings.

"I have been neglectful, and spent too much time in the study," she thinks, with reproachful compunction. "I once thought that she might learn to love some one more than she did Jack. I now see my mistake. I will send for Jack immediately."

She thanks De Thysbaert gravely for his

information, telling him how indebted she feels to him.

"She has a lover at home," she is saying softly, "a good, honest boy, who loves her very dearly, and constituted as he is, I think always will. I cannot believe that Rose actually would consent to a marriage with a man of that description."

Then she remembers having wondered at Rose's amiability in talking so often to the disagreeable-looking old man. The possibility that Rose has used deception with her sorely troubles her.

"You really care?" says De Thysbaert, wonderingly, marvelling at her apparent distress.

"Care, Monsieur!" she answers indignantly, "certainly I care! and regret, too, that my sister should have fallen so low as to entertain for an instant the sale of herself to that old man. I dare say that the next thing I shall be told is that they are in love with each other!"

"Who says," he replies, "'Love knows no difference between May and December'?"

"That is absurd, as you know," she answers, "but I am nearer this moment to being furious than ever I was in my life before. Your friend is not only wanting in womanly delicacy, but in generosity as well."

"Why do you persist in calling Céleste my friend?" he asks, with a shade of vexation in his voice.

"Is she not?" she asks.

"Most assuredly," he answers, "as well as is her husband."

"You call Joseph Pierrepont your friend?" she says, the smile returning to her face.

"Why not?" he asks.

"You should erect a temple to Melpomene," she replies, "and give yourself up to her exclusive worship. You Parisians are all such excellent comedians. What a farce, Monsieur. —a friendship between you and Pierrepont! Perhaps I should not say it, but if I were in Joseph Pierrepont's place I should kill you."

"But why?" he asks, his face flushed to a dusky red. He determines that since she has gone so far, he will embarrass her if possible.

"Because," she answers, flushing hotly, "if I

were a man I should not permit the woman bearing my name to dishonor it, nor the lover of my wife to live and triumph in my shame!"

"Mademoiselle," he replies, "you make it impossible for me to reply as I could," annoyed but forced to admit her bravery, "but, permit me to say this, that appearances ofttimes belie facts. Nor is Pluto of as dark a hue as he is represented. What is more, the *modern* Proserpinas make but little resistance at their seizure from the Elysian fields."

"Granted," she says, "but that fact does not exculpate Pluto from the theft any the more," and as she sees others coming towards the door, rises to meet them. It is Rose, with one of the men staying in the house.

"Well," she exclaims impulsively, seeing who it is occupying the room, "this is a new rôle for you, Kate! and I declare if it is not Monsieur de Thysbaert, too! Well!"—a long, prolonged exclamation of complete astonishment.

"You seem surprised, Mlle. Rose," says De Thysbaert. "Will you not tell me what there is so remarkable in the fact of Miss Langdon being here with me?"

But Rose has partly recovered from her astonishment, and now is able to say pleasantly, "Nothing remarkable in her being with you, but rather wonderful to see her overcoming her prejudices for a *tetê-à-tète*."

"This is an exceptional case, Rose," says her sister, "and I promise not many repetitions. Pray where was your and Mr. Carlton's destination, if not here?"

"Oh, that is different," answers Rose, illogically; "I admit that I find pleasure in the frivolities and little weaknesses of life, but you have always professed to be so far above them that it behooves you to be consistent."

"I will leave you," says Kate, rising, "to make your peace with Mr. Carlton, who, if I were he, should demand an elaborate apology for being termed 'a frivolity or little weakness of life.'" And with her soft, low laugh full of amusement, she passes through the *portière* followed by De Thysbaert.

"Oh, Kate," calls her sister, running after her, "may I come to your room to-night? Do not fasten your door until I shall have come!" A significant glance passes between

Miss Langdon and De Thysbaert, both guessing the cause of her visit.

"Very well; a consultation over a new gown, I suppose?" says Miss Langdon.

"No," says Rose, "a question of much less importance;" but it is with rather a nervous little laugh that she rejoins her companion.

That night, after Miss Langdon has gone to her apartments, she intentionally delays as long as possible over her bath, so that Rose, knocking at the door a few minutes later, has it opened to her by a strange young woman instead of by Brooks.

"These are my sister's rooms. You have doubtless made a mistake," she says, thinking that the girl may be some new employee of Céleste's, and had mistaken Kate's rooms for those of Madame Pierrepont's.

"Pardon me; I am in Miss Langdon's employ," says the woman, in a low, respectful tone. Rose notices the refined, lady-like appearance of the girl, and the particularly sad expression of her face. Kate, coming in a moment later, explains briefly, "Rose, this is Mlle. Hélène,

my new amanuensis. — Mlle. Brooks will show you your room."

"Where did you get *her?*" asks Rose, curiously, as the door closed gently after her.

"She was recommended to me, and pleasing me, I engaged her," said Miss Langdon, evasively.

"But she does not look like a servant," said Rose. "Did you notice how well she walks? One would almost say that she was a lady."

"She has met with reverses," answers Miss Langdon, briefly. "She has been making fine lace for a living, but not finding that sufficient to gain a livelihood, decided to accept the position I offered her; and I think that she is going to prove very valuable to me."

"Has she any people to bother you?" asks Rose.

"No, I believe not now," answers Miss Langdon. "She and a sister originally came from some village in Normandy. For some time they lived upon the proceeds of their lace making. The sister finally died, I am afraid from privation and poverty, and this one was left

destitute. I am very happy that I chanced to come across her."

"But she appeared to me to be uncommonly pretty as she opened the door," said Rose.

"Poor girl! Her beauty availed her but little," said Kate.

"It is a wonder," said Rose, "that so pretty a woman as that should be so poor."

"I do not understand you, Rose," says her sister, severely, "nor do I see where there is any wonder in a pretty woman being a good one. I am still more surprised that such thoughts should have suggested themselves to you. It has pained me not a little to notice lately a tendency in you to ignore, and make light of, the very thoughts and principles that we have been taught to look upon all our lives as the only right ones."

"What are you lecturing about now?" says Rose, unpleasantly conscious that her sister's mood is anything but a propitious one for the confession that she has come to make.

"Oh, nothing. I am only finding fault again," says Miss Langdon, as though her prior words had been uttered unintentionally. "I

am in 'one of my disagreeable moods,' as you used to say. But to a pleasanter subject. When did you hear from Jack?"

"Two — two weeks ago," says Rose, hurriedly.

"Of course you have answered it," says Miss Langdon.

"No, not yet," confusedly from Rose.

"Rose Langdon, are you not ashamed?" says her sister, continuing with burlesque gravity. "Hearken unto me. 'T is the hour of midnight. The wan moon is overhead, and the air is heavy with the perfume of flowers. A maiden fair leans upon her casement window, and, casting her eyes heavenward, gently murmurs, 'Do you know, Kate, that if anything were to happen to him, I should die! — *dear*, *dear* Jack!'"

The intonation of her words is perfect, and immediately the fiercest resentment is born in Rose's heart for this satirical reminder of her inconstancy.

"I do not see the consistency of your words," she says, with a ludicrous assumption of dignity.

"Nor I the consistency in your actions with your words," Kate adds with provoking cool-

ness, as she brushes the thick, black hair falling around her shoulders and below her waist.

"I ask you again to be a little more explicit, and less mysterious in your expressions," says Rose, with increased frigidness.

"With pleasure," says Miss Langdon, with the smile that Rose always dreads to see. "It is merely this, that I think your present indifference towards your lover contrasts rather badly with your exaggerated devotion of a few months ago."

"Because I have allowed a few weeks to elapse before answering his letter," scornfully, "do you call that neglect?" asks Rose.

"Yes," answers Miss Langdon; "knowing you as well as I do, my dear sister, I must decidedly say that I do."

"Well, suppose that I admit it is," says Rose, "what then?" furtively looking at her sister to see the effect of these words.

"It will simply authenticate my supposition, that is all," says Miss Langdon, coolly.

"I think that you might be a degree more agreeable," answers Rose, angrily.

"'Agreeable,' did you say?" asks Miss Langdon.

"Yes, agreeable," answers Rose, her pretty little face deeply flushed with anger. "I came up here to-night hoping to find you sympathetic, only to be met with — yes, the coldest-blooded repulsion. I had something to tell you, and now I shall not."

"As you like, dear," answers her sister.

"Don't 'dear' me," says Rose, hotly; "you are enough to goad a saint to madness. You think," scathingly, "that you are so supercilious and high and lofty, and all that, while you are only disagreeable, and make yourself absurd, ridiculously absurd."

"Anger is decidedly becoming to you," says Miss Langdon, dispassionately contemplating the excited and sparkling eyes, and in no way moved by these invectives and reproaches. Rose, recognizing this, as is always the case with these two, changes her tactics, and bursts into a passionate fit of weeping. She wins instantaneously. Down goes Miss Langdon's hairbrush, and her arms are around her sister. All the ironical laughter and mockery are gone

from her voice as she says soothingly, expostulatingly: "Hush, you ridiculous baby! Do not cry, Rose. You make me feel like a murderer or an assassin."

"But why, why, Kate, are you so unkind?" only half mollified, and still comfortably sobbing.

"Unkind? Oh, Rose, am I unkind?" asks her sister. "I am sure that I do not intend to be, and certainly to you least of all. Listen to me," she says earnestly, half sadly.

As she stands there in her white dressing-gown, and her wealth of black hair enveloping her like a dark cloud, with all the laughter in her luminous eyes hushed, she seems like some prophetess of old, whose mandates it were sacrilegious, indeed, to disobey.

"I understand," she says, "all that you have to say to me, and I am grieved, inexpressibly grieved, that it is so. The moral, as well as the physical repugnance alone, I should think, would have made such a thought impossible with you."

Rose starts. How could Kate have divined, as surely her words imply that she has?

"How did you know?" she asks, her pretty face shamed, and her head hung.

Her sister pays no attention to her question, but continues softly, as though fearing to give her pain:

"Jack was a bonnie lover, Rose, and loved you well. Remember his kisses, his caresses. Can you think what you are substituting for them? An old, dissipated man with no higher, nobler thought than the possession of your beauty and youth; to buy it, to pay for it with the same gold that has paid perchance for hundreds of others whom his fancy has coveted! The only difference is that these marriages are *legal* prostitutions, where the others are not. These are sanctioned by the laws, while the others are not. The moral degradation is not a whit different, nor is the woman who sells herself for millions an atom superior to the woman who sells herself for cents. A few words uttered by an ordained minister, and the approbation of a false society, do not efface the moral stigma of such a crime. I cannot yet believe that you have come seriously to talk of such a possibility as this marriage. Surely you

love Jack — Jack, with his warm, loving heart? Better a thousand times an hour of this love than the long, unlovely years of wifely duty, barren of even respect. Only think, Rose, of the abhorrence and disgust that you would feel every time this old man approached. Think of all the name 'wife' implies. Oh, Rose, how could you? — how could you?"

There was a suppressed vehemence in the words, gently as they were spoken, which chilled her auditor to the heart; and for the first time what the future would really be appeared to her. She did not dare look into her sister's clear, cloudless eyes and tell her that which had seemed so plausible and possible coming from Céleste's lips, — that Jack, whom she really in her girlish heart loved as well as ever, she intended should always be her lover. She had thought that it would be possible to say this, but looking at her sister, she suddenly feels that if she were to speak the words, this other woman's hand would strike her to the earth. Céleste, who had seemed so much greater, and by whom Kate's paler light of experience had seemed as nothing, suddenly

loses some of her ascendancy. But because, by Céleste's continual efforts and encouragement, she had become reconciled to the marriage, and dazzled by the vast wealth that should be hers, she is able to say, —

"But, Kate, there are few richer men in France."

"And," said her sister, "you think that these riches will compensate for the dream that you and every woman has of possible love and happiness? You think the mere gratification of corporal desires will suffice for the spiritual longing and craving of a woman's heart for love? It is not probable that you would have children, and what safeguard would be left to you? What would your fate be? To become a painted, corrupt insult to pure womanhood like her under whose roof we are, defiling the sacred name of wife, and paying by the basest, vilest ingratitude the man whose name you bore, and whose gold paid for the bread you ate? What signify a few additional diamonds, a few more houses, to the moral, gnawing cancer ever tugging at your heart which their possession causes?"

Her voice shakes a little as she says this. She is anxious, oh, so anxious, that she should use the right words. She sees Rose's eminent danger, and her anxiety to carry conviction is now intensified by the consciousness that perhaps she herself is not without some blame in her unguarded thoughtlessness. Rose does not reply for a moment, but she finally says, her eyes still refusing to meet her sister's, —

"If you think Céleste is a bad woman why do you remain here?"

"I have spoken to Joseph to-night," answers Kate, "and although he seems strongly opposed to our returning before the year has expired, I think it is not improbable that the next steamer will bear us homeward."

Rose looks up, and quite staggers Miss Langdon by the query, "And shall you not be desolate without the intelligent, highly intellectual companionship of Joseph Pierrepont?" It is the first time in Kate's remembrance that Rose has ever attempted sarcasm, and the effect on Miss Langdon is certainly something wonderful.

"Rose!" she exclaims, staring hard at her, "are you insane?"

"I have heard you, Kate," answers Rose, "now suppose you listen to me equally as patiently. You are horrified and unstinted in your condemnation of this contemplated marriage. Pray tell me which is worse in a moral sense, to contract such a marriage as this, legitimatized and accepted by the world as proper, or, by a constant, undivided intercourse with a married man, incur the gossip and censure of this same world, — spending day after day with him exclusively, accepting his attentions publicly, showing an open preference for him, seemingly only happy and contented when with him, correspondently bored and *distrait* when out of his presence? I do not know how this may appear to you, but, to use your own words, it seems slightly incongruous to me with your high, rigid, virtuous ideas of morality."

Miss Langdon's face becomes ashy white as Rose ceases speaking. She feels that she has been stricken by a blow; that Rose, whom she had loved, oh, so well, should offer her this insult. An impulse comes to her to seize her sister and bid her, no, force her to unsay her

words. She is more hurt than she fully realizes herself. Not a vestige of color is in the cold, proud face as she turns towards Rose.

"Good-night," she says coldly, and without further words passes into her dressing-room, softly turning the key. Frightened and conscience-stricken at the effect her words had produced, and by the pale, haggard expression of her sister's face, Rose suddenly, fearfully awakes to the enormity of her fault. In a moment pride, pique, indignation,—all are forgotten. She rushes impulsively over to the door, crying:

"Oh, Kate, what a wretch I am! Darling, open the door! I did not mean a word of it! What did I say, anyhow? Oh, dear, won't you open the door!"

But her tears and pleadings are all in vain to-night. No forgiveness is vouchsafed to her repentance, which is generally forthcoming at the first visible sign of compunction. She is obliged finally, by the lateness of the hour, to retire to her own room, where all through the long hours of the night she lies awake worrying.

CHAPTER V

THE following morning finds Miss Langdon and Pierrepont as usual in the study. It is not until the clock on the mantel strikes twelve that Miss Langdon rises with a gesture of relief, and says abruptly, without further introduction to the subject that she has in mind, —

"I am very glad that our morning work is over, for I have much that I should like to say to you."

"Judging by the gravity on your usually benign countenance, I should say that it was a matter of most weighty importance," said Pierrepont. "Well, what is it?"

"I should like to go home on the next steamer," she says simply.

"What?" he asks, starting to his feet, "the next steamer! Well, I hope not, and for many steamers yet to come."

"I really wish to go," she repeats, "nor do I care to explain the reasons for my sudden departure. Sufficient that I think it best we go."

"But when did you conceive this disagreeable, preposterous plan?" he says.

"I spoke to you some time ago, you remember," she answers, "and events of later occurrence almost make it imperative."

"Come, Kate," says her cousin, "admit that there is a man in the affair, and then, perhaps, although I must never be expected to consent to your going, still, if you confess, I will go so far as to condescend to discuss the question with you. Now honestly admit 'Man' to be an important lever in the balance."

"There are several men in the affair," she says, smiling, "but I really wish to go."

He tries to dissuade her from such notion, and finally, after a discussion which has lasted the whole of their recess, succeeds in obtaining a promise from her that she will not leave France until a certain part of their work shall have been finished. As she knows that at the farthest this cannot take longer than a few weeks, she finally acquiesces, but

she is strangely unlike herself all the morning. Pierrepont tells his wife, when he goes to her room that night, that he thinks "Kate has deceived them all," that there does exist "some love affair of which they are all ignorant."

Henri de Thysbaert, passing through the library that afternoon, meets Miss Langdon on her way upstairs. They have but a few minutes' conversation, but sufficient to cause Kate to send at once the following note to Céleste:

"Will you give me a few moments alone before dinner? I desire to speak with you concerning a subject which interests both;" and Céleste had sent back the cordial invitation, "Come at any time. No one but Rose and me is here."

The afternoon is several hours older before Miss Langdon presents herself at Madame Pierrepont's apartments. She has studiously avoided Rose since the memorable scene last night, nor does she show any recognition of her presence when opening the door in response to Céleste's, "Come in." She sees

Rose and her hostess lying on the lounges, smoking their cigarettes.

"I wish to see you alone, if possible," Miss Langdon says, in no way embarrassed. By both women's faces she is made aware that Rose has told Céleste of last night.

"You want Rose to go?" says Céleste, pleasantly, enjoying this existing state of coldness between the two.

"Yes," says Miss Lángdon, calmly.

Rose goes wonderingly, and not without some trepidation. Experience of old had taught her that this impassive, cold manner boded no hilarious condition of affairs. She tries to say naturally, as she passes Kate, but the tremor in her voice makes it a signal failure, "Murder, you know, dearest, is a capital punishment in this country."

After the door has closed Céleste looks at Kate Langdon curiously, and wonders what her mission may be.

"Have a cigarette?" she says pleasantly; "but I forgot that you only smoke alone. I could find no enjoyment in that."

Miss Langdon quite ignores this speech.

Seating herself she says, with calm composure:

"I have come merely to say that I disapprove of this marriage that you have been contemplating for Rose, and expect you to convey to the suitor the emphatic assurance that the thing is utterly impossible."

"Indeed?" says Céleste, opening wide her pretty eyes.

"Quite impossible," repeats Miss Langdon, imperturbably. "Most women would not care; I do. You will oblige me by seeing that there is no delay in this decision reaching the man in question," she adds with smiling effrontery.

Céleste says, with equal coolness, also smiling: "Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind. To be perfectly frank with you, I shall, on the contrary, exert all my power in consummating the alliance which, putting my interest for Rose out of the question, your good judgment must tell you is in every way desirable."

"My judgment fails to be in any such conciliatory mood," says Miss Langdon, smilingly. The smile irritates Céleste more than she cares to confess. Something in Kate's cool, possessed

manner tells her that perhaps she has met with her equal in *finesse* at last.

"What are your objections?" asks Céleste, idly toying with her cigarette, as though the whole subject rather bored her, and that she was listening only out of magnanimous politeness.

"I prefer not to state them; there are so many," answers Miss Langdon, "that it would be irksome. I only want it distinctly understood that the marriage, or the betrothal, for that matter, is not to take place."

"Have you consulted Rose?" asks Céleste, with an unlovely laugh, that is not without some defiance in it.

"No," says Miss Langdon, "I do not think that is necessary. She," significantly, "is only the tool, in either my hands or yours, and I prefer that it should be in mine."

"I do not think that you can stop it now," says Céleste, good-naturedly; "in fact, I have almost announced it."

"I think that I can," quietly says Miss Langdon.

"Try," suggests Céleste.

"I undoubtedly shall," answers Kate.

"And when you fail?" asks Céleste.

"I shall at least have tried," says Kate, smiling.

That smile again! Céleste hates her for it. What does she mean by that cool, superior air that she assumes?

"The contest will be quite diverting," suggests Céleste, a little maliciously.

"Quite, I should say," assents Miss Langdon.

"May the enemy learn your first move?" says Céleste.

"Certainly," answers Miss Langdon, "although, when I came here I had no intention of exposing my plans unless forced to. My words are no idle threats; they always seem to me such bad form. I am quite fond of my sister, and would save her from herself if possible. I am fond of her to the extent that there are few lengths that I would not go to secure her happiness. Your idea of its acquirement and mine differ slightly. Your husband," in the same even, calm voice, "is very, very fond of you. Your married life so far has been cloudless. If you wish it to remain so, these

marriage preparations *must* be summarily stopped. Your husband has the most implicit confidence in your love and honor. Living in your house I must of necessity see and hear many things. Observation may be a poor return for hospitality, but sometimes it is unavoidable. I do not intend to threaten. Nothing could be in worse taste under the circumstances. At times, however, a frankness and perspicuity of speech are absolutely necessary. It appears to me that this is one of the occasions. I think that you understand the peculiarities of your husband's character sufficiently to know that he is enough of an American to expect his wife's exclusive attentions. Messieurs de Thysbaert, Rito, and Gorn are doubtlessly all charming men, and very good friends, but I am not sure that their friendship may not be a degree warmer than would meet with Joseph Pierrepont's approbation, if he knew it as it really is. You force me to use the only effective weapons that I have."

Céleste is very, very angry. The color comes and recedes in her face. She is ardently wishing that she could get her hands on that cool

white throat, from which issue these insolant words.

"How, Miss Langdon! You would insult me?" she says indignantly, making a step forward.

"No," answers Miss Langdon, her calm contrasting strangely with Céleste's suppressed fury, "I assure you that this interview is very disagreeable to me, and that my words are no vulgar retaliation. You simply have forced them. I will be as brief as possible. I recognize the power that you have over Rose; I am afraid that it is stronger than mine. But because this marriage is in every way distasteful to me, I will tell you frankly, without disguise of any kind, that unless, through your efforts, all ideas of the kind are effaced from Rose's mind, I, in order to save her, will go to Joseph Pierrepont and tell him the exact relationship existing between you and Henri de Thysbaert. I shall also warn him that it is of such a nature that no man who has any respect for himself would permit. I am quite capable of doing exactly as I say. I think you realize this."

Céleste's inward rage and fury know no

bounds, and it is only with the greatest effort that she is able to restrain herself. A something tells her that this woman would indeed be capable of doing what she threatens. Oh, how Céleste curses her in her heart, and the blind, impotent fates that had brought her presence here! She knows that if Pierrepont ever came to understand what these "friendships" of hers implied, forgiveness would be impossible; and it was true, horribly, unacceptably true, that the luxurious life and position his name gave her, was in sharp contrast to the comfortable, but far from luxurious one, that she had led with her mother in their impoverished "*château*" just out of Paris. Here it was only with the strictest economy that they were enabled to keep up the appearances necessary to procure an eligible *parti* for Céleste. If Pierrepont only were a Frenchman, she thinks for the thousandth time! He would of course then understand, and except for a shrug of his shoulders, not care. But with his American, old-fashioned ideas, how would he receive such a story as this girl threatened to concoct? In spite of her accustomed bravery,

and the reliance that she generally places upon chance, Céleste shudders, probably for the first time in her life overcome by fear. Her cruel, cold smile, however, never deserts her face, and even Miss Langdon is wondering what its presence may mean.

"You are a remarkably clever woman!" says Céleste, finally, smiling and showing her brilliant white teeth; "*a remarkably clever woman!* You seem to hold the winning cards. I even admit that it has that appearance to me. I acknowledge that you have won. It would be folly to do otherwise. Perhaps, however, in the next game we play together I may be more successful."

"I am to understand, then, that this marriage shall not take place?" says Miss Langdon, coolly, but withal relieved.

"No, it shall not take place," acquiesces Céleste. Her face is white, and her speech husky, and the full red lips redder. There is an awkward pause for a moment, broken by Miss Langdon saying:

"I doubtlessly owe you an apology for this scene, but, circumstances being as they were, it

was impossible to avoid it. I shall, as you may readily imagine, transgress no longer on your hospitality than is absolutely requisite to make the necessary preparations for departure. Both Rose and I are greatly indebted to you for a most charming time. Whatever yours and your husband's motive may have been for the invitation, you have made our visit one of great pleasure, for which I thank you."

"It must be done," Céleste is thinking to herself, biting her lips, and who has not heard a word of the last of this speech. With what seems a gesture of admirable good-nature and friendliness, she puts out her hand, saying impulsively:

"Come, Kate, let us be friends! I have no doubt that you have just cause for being shocked. You American women never do understand the necessary ingredients of a Frenchwoman's composition. Our peccadilloes and *petites choses* are to you synonymous with the most atrocious crimes and vices. I dare say that I have been a little indiscreet, according to your ideas. As for Rose's marriage, I had no idea," unblushingly, "that you really

entertained any serious opposition to it; and my antagonism when first you mentioned it was merely prompted by a little desire to tease."

Miss Langdon, being an exceedingly wise woman, accepts this explanation. She reads Céleste thoroughly, but determines if possible that Céleste shall not see this.

"I confess that I was a little anxious," she says, with smiling dissimulation; "all French women seem to be such inveterate match-makers that I feared you were no exception."

Céleste suddenly thinks by this readily renewed friendship that Kate, after all, may not be as shrewd as she thought her, while Miss Langdon at the same time is wondering whether her ruse of words has succeeded. Rose, returning, finds Céleste alone, and apparently asleep, and does not care to disturb her, but is decidedly curious to be told the meaning of this long conference with Kate.

A few hours later Miss Langdon is saying to Pierrepont in the study: "I told your wife this morning of our departure."

"Nonsense," says Pierrepont, irritably. "I shall not hear of your going."

"You are very kind," she answers, "but I think that we must go."

"Be reasonable, now, Kate," he says, with more feeling in his words than he is conscious of; "we have all been so happy here together, and there is not the slightest cause for your return to America."

"Aunt May and Uncle John," she suggests.

"Pshaw! Now what do you really care about them?" he asks.

"I am very fond of them," she says, half wondering whether she really is or not.

"I hate to imagine you not here," he says slowly, "for we have become accustomed to your presence, and cannot very well do without it."

"I am glad that you have such a proper appreciation of my value," she says, with a return to her old playfulness. "But then, there are so many reasons that make it best we should return, — one, not the least important, is Rose's marriage."

"Rose's marriage!" he says, amazed. "Why, Céleste, I thought — "

"Yes," she continues, not noticing his re-

mark, "I think that I shall marry her off. Perhaps we owe it to the world at large for one of us to marry, and I prefer that she should be the victim."

"Are you serious?" he asks.

"Unquestionably so," she answers. "It was quite an ideal love affair, only I disapproved of a too premature consummation, fearing that the young woman might not be as constant as appearances indicated. I need not say how far right I was in my surmises when I tell you that she is at this moment seriously contemplating accepting old Mr. Giron and his millions. Your wife has promised, however, to add her efforts to mine in frustrating this plan."

"Yes," he says; "Céleste was telling me, dear child, how horrified she was! Poor little woman! Because our marriage was one of love, any other kind seems horrible to her."

"Yes," assents Miss Langdon; but had he looked up suddenly he could not have failed to see the half-contemptuous, half-mirthful expression of her eyes.

"But still," he continues, "I fail to see why this should necessitate your leaving. Why

not import Romeo, and have the wedding here?"

"You are very kind," she repeats, "but that would be impossible."

"Frankly speaking," he says, rising and coming towards her, "I am not only opposed to your going on general principles, but *I* shall miss you greatly. You have become indispensable to me in my work. You are one of the most congenial women whom I have ever met. My wife is a lovely child, God bless her! I would not have it otherwise; but you —"

"Take care, Pierrepont. Comparisons are dangerous."

"You are a woman to whom I can appeal intellectually. You have no idea how valuable your clear thought and assistance have been in making my work what it is. I like to be with you, to consult you. I like to have Céleste with you, to learn from you."

Kate is sufficiently a woman to mildly expostulate here.

"Are you not aware that your wife is a year my senior?"

"Yes," he says, "but she is only a child, an

inexperienced, loving, impulsive child. Your years may not number more, but womanhood, strength, force, — all are yours."

"Your praise is becoming quite embarrassing," she laughs, but by no means confused, "and I am quite shocked at your want of taste in discovering anything admirable in any woman except Céleste."

"You are pleased to quiz and laugh at me for my love for my wife," he says, "but I believe in my heart that you only honor and respect me more for showing this devotion."

"Yes, I do," she answers, with unexpected gravity. "I think," slowly, as though picking her words, "that you are as honorable and good a man as I ever saw."

He flushes with pleasure at her words. This voluntary approval was so thoroughly unexpected, and coming from her who has always been so chary of praise, it has double value in his eyes. But he answers simply, as some boy might, "Well, I try to be."

Although the man is still passionately in love with his wife, yet there come moments of dissatisfaction and discontent to him which

all the analysis and self-retrospection could not bring to a satisfactory conclusion. He was rich, enjoyed the blessing of a perfect constitution, and was the possessor of one of the prettiest wives in France, who, he believed, loved him devotedly. Surely, this was enough happiness for any man! Still, there were times when he was conscious of a desire and an exceeding longing for a something that refused to assume a tangible shape. "A noble-hearted, generous, high-minded man with all with whom he comes in contact," one of his best friends, a prominent man of the day, used always to say when Pierrepont was the subject of discussion. His confidence in his wife was supreme. To him she was the incarnation of purity, goodness, and innocence. Many of his friends wondered at his obtuseness in this matter, so shrewd a man was he in all other particulars. Still, they wisely forbore to hint to him, or to open his eyes to the true state of affairs.

It was decided finally, much to the regret of many, that the Misses Langdon should return to America on the next steamer. Céleste's apparent grief at the prospect of losing them

was quite touchingly pathetic. She declared that she would be inconsolable after their departure, that she was half tempted to go with them herself; she sighed dolorously, and so acted, that Beelzebub, "the very god of deceit," would have wondered whether her protestations were not genuine. Pierrepont concurs with everything she says. It is clear that he really does regret it. Rose, after Miss Langdon's interview with Céleste, had suspicions as to what the *tête-à-tête* might have related. She had asked Céleste, but this lady had evasively refused any enlightenment. Rose did notice that the subject of her marriage was less dwelt on now than formerly. She was therefore rather prepared for, than surprised, when Céleste informed her, a week or so later, that old Mr. Giron had gone to America, and would probably stay a year instead of the few months that he had planned to spend there, and had jokingly asked Rose whether she could wait for the realization of her joyous conjugal bliss that long? Then she had incidentally said that she had decided to find a more eligible *parti*, having concluded that old Giron might, after all, pro-

long his existence longer than was "nominated in the bond." Rose did not quite understand the origin of this change of sentiment, but in her heart was fervently relieved that it was so.

It is a few nights before their departure. A few nights hence will see them on the sea, with their eyes turned towards the new world again. Because these are the last evenings, they have accepted no social invitations, and are all assembled to-night in the larger drawing-room. Besides Rito, who is devotion itself to Madame Pierrepont, and De Thysbaert, there are several additional friends of Pierrepont as guests in the house. All seem more or less impressed by the impending departure. Pierrepont frankly admits to the room at large, that he never felt "nearer miserable" in his life. Rose confesses that she has no desire to return, and that she has had "an awfully jolly time!" Henri de Thysbaert gives vent to rather an exaggerated piece of sentiment contained in the declaration "that they were the only two women who had ever made it possible for him to love with the same amount of fervor, at the

same time." Miss Langdon makes a grimace at Pierrepont, and De Thysbaert, accidentally looking up, intercepts it, and attempts to embarrass her by a returning glance which tells her that he has seen it. It is only a careless smile that he gets in return.

"Caught!" says Pierrepont, mercilessly.

"Decidedly!" she answers, breaking out into her low, sweet, pleasant laugh. They are all sitting in closer proximity than usual to-night, not *tête-à-tête à deux*, as is generally the order of the evenings. De Thysbaert is strangely preoccupied, and although Céleste is flirting desperately with Rito, she is not once rewarded for her efforts by any recognition of them from Henri. Had a bombshell fallen in their midst, it could not have excited more surprise than when he suddenly rose, looking hard at Kate, and said distinctly:

"I dare say that I am a selfish brute, Miss Langdon, but you will make me very happy if you will consent to go into the conservatory with me for a while. I have something that I wish to say to you, if you will be kind enough to listen."

"I advise you to go, Kate; it may be a proposal," suggests Pierrepont.

Céleste is smiling, but is grateful that the rouge hides the pallor that she feels stealing over her face. De Thysbaert's eyes are still fixed on Miss Langdon, half pleading, half commanding. Some impulse, though she tries to repel it, is bidding her go, although she is conscious that she would be justified in a refusal.

"Will you not come?" he asks, in a low voice, and they all with different feelings are waiting her answer. She laughs a little peculiarly, ignoring the others, and saying to him:

"Do you know, I do not want to go, and yet there seems some invisible force compelling me! Yes, come; I will go with you!" rising suddenly, answering with her eyes the gleam of amusement in Pierrepont's. The delicate, tortoise-shell fan in Céleste's hand snaps in two with a sharp, quick click, as the girl with her long white draperies, and the man who had but a few short weeks ago been her lover, *hers* only, disappear behind the thick *portières*.

"By Jove! Looks deucedly like he was in earnest! I wonder whether she would have him?" ejaculates one of the men,—a boyish, good-looking young Englishman, who had not been unimpressed himself by Kate's charms.

"If there be any truth in the old saying that 'extremes meet,'" said another, "surely this is a case of fire and ice!"

"Monsieur," says Pierrepont, annoyed, although he cannot tell why, "I do not believe that there is a man living whom my cousin would marry!"

"What a sweeping assertion, my dear!" suggests Céleste.

"But," answers her husband, "my Darling, I think that is even so. Although Henri is a good fellow all round, he is the very last man in the world that such a woman as she would choose for a husband."

"Why not?" asks Céleste.

"Oh, because — because —" he answers. "Well — for one reason — but, pshaw! I do not intend to commit myself, and thereby bring your righteous wrath down upon me for making disparaging remarks of your favorites!"

"Henri is a dear boy!" she manages to say, while mentally she is imagining every detail of the *tableau* now enacting behind those *portières*. She strains her ear to catch even the murmur of their voices, although she knows how impossible the distance will make this.

"You are wondering what my motive was for asking you to come in here?" De Thysbaert is saying, as the curtains shut them from the sight and hearing of the others.

"Just then," she answers, laughing, "I was rather wondering what made me consent to come."

"Will you not sit down?" he asks, pushing one of the chairs towards her. "I cannot talk to you as you stand there looking so tall and cold!" A little amused laugh greets this speech as she complies with the request.

"I have a great deal that I want to say to you," he continues, taking one of the chairs nearest her. "Will you be kind enough to listen to it?"

"Provided you have no intention of making love to me," she says, quizzically smiling.

"Well, but suppose that I have?" he an-

swers, his gravity contrasting strangely with her mirth.

"Then," she replies, "I should tell you to desist; but I am a little doubtful of your assuming such a rôle just now!"

"Can you, and will you not, be serious for a moment?" he says.

"Certainly," she answers, "but I see no cause for being so now."

"You are going home in a day or so," he says, "leaving France, perhaps, forever, and yet you leave it without a single regret."

"I hope," she answers, "that this is not to be a lecture on my inconsistency of temperament, because if so, the subject is inexhaustible."

"No," he says, "I should be the last one to see anything inconsistent about you. I have asked you to come here with me to-night," steadying his voice with an effort, "to offer you my name and fortune. You are the first woman whom I ever saw whom I had any desire to make my wife. No, I beg of you, listen to me. My family is one of the oldest in France; my fortune large enough to satisfy the most mercenary woman, — which you are

not, but I mention it merely because, in a worldly consideration, this fact would be considered an advantage. Let my life have been what it may, I promise you in the future that it shall be all that you would wish the man's you call your husband to be. Do not answer me with any hackneyisms, 'that you are sensible of the honor,' etc., etc., but consider what I have said. Search that cold heart of yours, and try to find in it some answering warmth. You are the only woman, I repeat, whom I have ever asked to be my wife. This, perhaps, may make you understand the strength and fervor of my passion for you. See!" drawing nearer, his eyes shining and covetous, as he gazes on the graceful figure of the woman before him, "to be able to take you to my arms, to cover you with my kisses, to call you all my own,— why, why, I would court death itself!"

He is greatly excited, but, passionate a man as he is, there is something about this cold, beautiful girl that repels him. He does not dare so much as lay his hand on hers so near his. She, too, is very, very white, as she says calmly:

"You are really making me an offer of marriage! It surprises me! Yes, I can only thank you, Monsieur, and reject the honor."

"But," he cries fiercely, furious at her cool indifference, "you shall not answer me like that. You shall give me a reason for your refusal of one of the richest men in France. Forgive me! I know that is coarse; but is my great love nothing to you? Can you not see how much I must love you to ask you to be my wife? I, to whom, until I saw you, marriage was abhorrent! These women with whom I have been in daily contact all my life hitherto, have formed all ideas that I have had of womanhood; and God knows what ideas they were! But you are different. You are the only really beautiful and pure woman I ever saw who was not a fool. You are a *grande dame* to your finger-tips, knowing and moving in the world, and yet not contaminated by it."

"That is what Pierrepont says of his wife," remarks Miss Langdon.

"Faugh!" he says, with a gesture of contempt. "An Enid to a Messalina! You know

what I mean. The same roof that shelters her is not fit to shelter you."

"You men are generous, chivalrous souls," says Miss Langdon, who, now that she has recovered from her first surprise, finds considerable to amuse her in this compulsory *tête-à-tête.* She continues, "You have been devotion personified to Céleste, Rumor says, for months and months, and yet the very next woman whose face, or trick, or manner of speech, takes your fancy, lo! she is forgotten. Her sacrifices (which are always part of the rôle of the woman who loves, or imagines she loves) go for naught with you. Not being constitutionally able to entertain any moral scruples, she is absolutely, irrevocably forgotten in the pursuit of a newer caprice, whose destiny it is to share the same fate at the first appearance of satiety. And this is as inevitable as the following of day on night!"

"You are cruel! Listen to me," he says passionately. "Can you not understand the difference between a love that *you* are capable of inspiring, and the love that she might inspire? How obnoxious the falsity of the

spurious gold is beside the pure, unadulterated metal!"

"A poor simile," she says; "I should have given you credit for more originality. But come; let us go. I fear that my love of argument has made me selfish. Your lady-love doubtless looks upon me now as an interloper, and an infractor on her rights."

As she moves towards the curtain, with a bound he is on his feet, and bars her way, and his face is anything but pleasant to look on now.

"You may think that I am a madman," he says fiercely, hotly, "but, by Heaven, you shall not leave me with nothing to remember except the echo of your contemptuous laughter! Give me your reasons for refusing me; I have both wealth and position, the two things that you women value so highly, and that some of you move heaven and earth itself to acquire. I am no monster, no physical deformity. Why should you, the one woman I covet, be impossible to me? As to loving me, does one expect warmth from ice? Listen!" he says, his eyes gleaming, his breath coming hard, "I would

sell my very soul to the Devil for one voluntary, unrepugnant embrace from you. For you, of your own will, to put those soft white arms of yours around me, and whisper, 'I love you!'"

"Pardon my egotism," she says dryly, "but would not that seem to be a fair representation of Titania and Bottom?"

He flushes at the covert meaning of her words, but tacitly gives it his own interpretation. "Yes, even an ass, to gain your love," he says, so ludicrously meek that it calls forth a low, ringing peal of laughter from her.

"Oh," she laughs, "if only rudeness were pardonable, what an opportunity to get off something really brilliant!"

"You are pleased to be mirthful," he says icily, beginning to lose his temper over this continuous levity, with which she so persistently receives all his words.

"If you get angry it will only increase my amusement," she warns him, coolly adding, "My own temper is so serene that my chief amusement is in ruffling those who are not."

"Do you not think," he asks, with an effort at calmness, "that when a man does a woman

the honor to ask her to be his wife, that that is at least entitled to common courtesy and respect?"

"Courtesy?" she replies, her face a degree more sober, but still the presence of a dimple lingers. "Courtesy, most assuredly, but respect," dubiously, "respect — it is quite cool here. Let us go!"

"Yes, respect! Why not respect?" he asks angrily, hating and admiring her at the same instant.

"Effrontery!" she answers, her face quite changed in expression. "Perhaps it is a strong word, but, Monsieur, looking back over the few months that have comprised our acquaintance, do you think that your mode of living and actions have been such as to inspire any woman with a superfluous amount of *respect* for you?"

"Why not?" he says, still half angrily. "You pure women, in the narrow, contracted, shielded lives you lead, — how are you able to recognize or judge men as the world judges them? Take a man's estimate of a man if you would find his real worth."

"Illogical again," she says, with aggravating coolness, "because a woman's standard necessarily never could be a man's, nor would it insure her happiness if it were so."

"You wilfully misunderstand me," he says; "I mean simply, that though the bestial instincts in us are great, they are a thing different and apart from our actual lives. A man may have his *affaires*, and yet love his wife with his whole soul, *love* only her."

"Yes," she assents, a little nervously, "what you say I have often thought may be true, but women are all monopolists at heart, and all the philosophy in the world can never make us look leniently on division!"

"You heard the story of the Russian," he asks, "who submitted to have his throat cut that his liege-lady might watch at her pleasure the drip, drip, of his life's blood?"

"I am sorry that I have no stiletto, or dagger," she says, understanding him, and then changing her tone, adds, "Leopards do not change their spots, nor Ethiopians their skin."

"I could, and would do anything for you,"

he says, with passionate fervor. "On my soul! I — I love you!"

"You think that you do," she says, not unkindly, and perhaps, woman-like, a little moved by his complete abandon, "but, doubtlessly," she continues, "this same intensity of feeling has possessed you on all prior occasions of this kind. Although possessing my normal share of vanity, yet I think that I can discriminate between love *coiffé* and love *pas coiffé*. Many women deceive themselves in imagining that a momentary passion is the basis of a lifelong devotion, while in reality it is only a transitory flame at the best, extinguished by marriage."

"You are a little hyperbolical in your assertion," he answers, "for does not the history of the world flatly contradict you? But," impatiently, "what do I care for all this moral analysis! Why is it that you should always have your way, never permitting others to have theirs?"

"What an amiable creature you make me!" she says pleasantly.

"I am asking you to be my wife," he says, with humble patience, "and you are — "

"Refusing you with a great many unneces-

sary words," she says; "but you know argument is my weakness. Possibly had you taken the other side, and insisted that you never would marry me, I should have been correspondingly unceasing in my efforts to convince you that your life's very happiness depended on that marriage!"

"And it does," he says half bitterly, like some child thwarted in its play; and he speaks truly when he adds: "You see how it is! Until I saw you, nothing in this world has ever been refused to me. I know that I am not a bad-looking fellow; and then, you see, having all this money — why, why! — all the women have made an infernal fool of me! What is a man to do when women literally throw themselves at him? Turn 'Joseph' and flee? Unfortunately that type has become extinct, if it ever did exist. Well, then, take a man who, from his boyhood up has been indulged, fêted, pampered by women of all classes, good and bad. Then consider the average man's weakness where woman is concerned, then foster and increase this weakness by the vilest, most cunning of modern Circeism, and I say with-

out hesitancy that few men would have any stronger claims to what you call 'honor and goodness' than I!"

"Stop!" she says gently; "since you will not take a simple negative for your answer, I will tell you where I think you could have been better, and more honorable. The story is rather long, and will bear of no interruption. Will it tire you to listen?"

"Tire me to hear your voice? Oh, no," he answers.

"Please do not make me laugh," she says half pleadingly, "for I want to be serious. I certainly never intended to speak of it to you, but what you have been saying to me to-night has given me the right. You will not misunderstand me when I speak plainly, will you?"

This humility in her manner rather staggers him, and as she stands there in her pure, regal womanhood, he sees with a sudden awakening what a waste of years his past life has been. He forgets that he is not fit to touch the hem of her garment, that he is profaning the very air she breathes. Success had made this impossible to him, but her presence gives

birth within him to a desire to appear better in her eyes than the world has painted him to her.

"It is a long story," she is saying, in her soft, sweet voice, which always sinks to its lowest cadence when she is grave. Seating herself with unconscious grace, and turning her eyes from him, that she may not see the possible effect her words may have, she begins:

"In the spring of a certain year there came to Paris from some little village in Normandy two young girls, orphans, lace-makers, hoping to gain in this great, over-crowded city a living that was impossible in their own country. Both girls were young, strong, and pretty, and at first had no difficulty in finding a sale for their work. But success gradually began to leave them. One of them became very ill, and finally died. The one left was only a child, seventeen years old, with nothing but a remarkable beauty, — no, hush! — and with the proceeds of her lace-making barely succeeded in eking out a miserable existence, although an honest one. Living in the garret of a tenement house in the worst part of Paris, daily

coming in contact with and surrounded by the worst and most vicious characters, yet she kept her innocence and purity intact. She was a child, and because youth and ignorance are ever hopeful, she lived on in this miserable poverty until actually reduced to her last crust of bread. Her innate virtue and antipathy to vice alone saved her at the time. The old woman from whom she rented the room repeatedly told her that with her face and figure she was a fool to work; but the girl did work, and strive and pray, living in the past, dreaming of her own village, of the green, waving trees, and the sweet-smelling grass. One night, weary and worn out with the futile efforts of an unsuccessful day, weak with hunger and privation, as she was crossing the *Pont au Neuf*, — no, I insist that you shall not interrupt, — on her way home, she fell on the side of the bridge, unconscious and half dead. There she lay until some men, coming from a night revel, passed her there. They took her for what she was not, and as she was half regaining consciousness, she heard them making some rude, coarse jests. She knew

not how long she had lain there, but the light of the sky told her that it must be long past the hour of midnight. While she strove to gain her feet, she saw coming back towards her one of the men of the party, still in sight in the distance."

"Great Heavens!" cries De Thysbaert, starting up. "You! How did you know?"

"Have you not promised not to interrupt?" she repeats, quietly continuing: "The man spoke kindly to her, calling her 'My poor child,' and asking her whether she was in distress, and whether he could not help her. This action, I think, having no incentive but pity, was noble of him. At the sound of kindness in a voice, the poor little heart completely broke, and the child sobbed out all her misery. The man drew her towards the light of the street lamp, and as he did so, must have been amazed at the startling loveliness of the tear-stained face raised to his. He was a man at all times impressible of a woman's beauty. He saw instantly how great hers was, and as instantly recognized that she was not what his companions had taken her for; her dress, her

poor little worn shawl, — no, not a word until I finish, — her basket of lace on her arm, all proclaimed her a good woman. I say again, the impulse that prompted him to return, actuated only by a desire to help some one, was noble, but the second impulse, alas! I cannot call so. Because he was clever and conscious how great and superior he must seem to this innocent girl, he was careful what he said, for fear that he might frighten the pretty bird so easily caught. She told him that she must have fainted, and thanked him again and again in her pretty way for his goodness; told him all about herself, and flushed hotly when he told her that he would see her home. Although it was long past midnight, he hailed a cab, and managed to get her some brandy and food at one of the saloons. The alley in which she lived was so narrow that a carriage could not pass through it. With kindest courtesy, he insisted that she should accept the support of his arm, and he left her at the door, half stunned, half dreaming, with strange, burning throbs in her heart, her girlish, innocent heart! Alcina! but, alas, not Rinaldo! He offered her no

money. Her frank acceptance of his kindness told him that money might hint to what he was not yet ready for her to know. All night long she lay awake, looking at a star, which gleamed fitfully, now seen, now lost through the broken pane of her single window. The brandy he had bought for her and bade her drink, had made her head feel so strangely, although it had strengthened her. As she thought of what had passed, his face seemed like that of an angel bending over her in pity, an angel surely 'like those in the old church at home.'

"This *aventure bizarre* of the night previous, the man, on awakening next day, remembers; nor does he forget the girl's beauty. She is so very weak that there seems nothing strange to her the next day to find food plentiful, and several people in her little shabby room; people who are kind to her, low of voice, and who bathe her head, and whisper words of comfort. She does not know that gold has been powerful enough to induce one of the best physicians in Paris to ascend those rickety steps, and exercise all his skill and science to bring back life and health to her a

poor little friendless lace-maker! Is it to be wondered that when life and strength came back to her, that with it should come unbounded, intense gratitude for her preserver? that her woman's heart should see in him a God to be worshipped, even to die for, if he so bade her? — Let me finish, I beg of you! — But a few weeks later who would recognize the little lace-maker in a woman, possessing the beauty of a Venus Aphrodite, sumptuously attired, and surrounded by all the art and elegance wealth can supply? But the beautiful woman, in her costly apparel and jewels, is the same young passionate, loving child! Her young face is now aglow with health and happiness. There is an air of sweet expectancy about her, as every now and then she strains her ear to hear the coming step of the man who has become her earth, her heaven, her all! With a little soft cry of pleasure, she runs to greet him as he opens the door. It is the same man who picked up the little lace-maker on the *Pont au Neuf*. She throws herself in his arms with a happy sigh of content. He holds her there in his passionate embrace, the woman whom the

'man world' of Paris had begun to call '*sans exception la plus ravissante femme du monde.*' He loved her at this time, or thought that he did, and was proud of her marvellous, wonderful beauty. The toy was still new, and he enjoyed being envied, and the exhibition of it. — No, hush! — Although it was only an '*amourette*' with him, it was life and death to her. Still the *affaire* so far had not sated, nor palled on him.

"But, as is so often the case with women who love, so it was with her. Satiety came, as it always had with him, and this passionate, whole-souled devotion of hers had become irksome and wearisome to him. She was a simple, ignorant child, knowing only one thing, and that was that she loved him. Although only his mistress, she would have looked with as much horror on any unfaithfulness towards him, in deed, word, or thought, as would the purest, most honorable wife in the land. Day by day he became more weary of his shackles. She, seeing his apparent distress over something, only grew more tender and loving, woman-like, thinking that sympathy —

all that she had to offer — might help him. He could not quarrel with her, and thereby acquire the freedom he was desiring, because she acquiesced in every thought and wish of his. He could not have a 'scene,' like those he so often had had with ruder, coarser women. Even he dared not do this. Forgive me, but then he did what was most base, most cowardly. He left her, with no word of parting but a long, cruel letter. Money being no object with him, he told her that he would provide liberally for her, suggesting that her beauty doubtlessly would soon find another as devoted a lover as he, to console her for his loss; 'that Ariadne at Naxos had not long to wait for Perseus.' This, to the woman who would have died for him, and whose only fault had been loving him too greatly! After a severe illness, brought on by the shock of his desertion, she finally rallied, and wrote to him, — no reproaches, no prayers, only a rejection of his money. She had accepted of him, she wrote, because she had believed that love had been the giver. The great Father alone knows whether he ever gave her a passing thought again.

She went back to the little garret where he had found her, and there her little child was born, — his child and hers. There I found them but a few hours from death."

As she finishes speaking, the tears suffuse and fill her eyes, and her voice ends in a broken sob. De Thysbaert has risen to his feet. Great beads of perspiration stand out on the man's forehead, and his hands are working convulsively.

"*You!*" he says hoarsely, "you, my God! that *you* should be the one to tell me this!" Then he says, with quick emphasis:

"I swear to you on my life, I never thought that she would suffer. Why did she not take the money? It was hers rightfully."

"She loved you!" she said gently, the woman in her wondering whether all men were thus.

"But how dared she speak to you?" he asks with sudden anger, and with a man's selfishness.

"She did not tell me. I discovered it myself," she says quietly, with scorn.

"Where is she now?" he asks with anger, and but little shame in his face.

The girl flushes hotly, as she gives utterance probably to one of the few untruths her lips have ever uttered.

"In America. I have done all that I can for her, and — the child!"

"You!" he repeats blankly, and then suddenly a hot dusky red suffuses his face.

"You may wonder," she says softly, "what object I had in speaking to you of this. I will tell you. I know that money has no value to you. Will you give me some of it?"

"What?" he says.

"Listen!" she answers. "She would rather starve than touch a penny of yours, even for her boy, whose being would make it justifiable; but if you will give it to me, I shall use it so that she may receive the benefit of it. Although my income is not small, it is not sufficient to educate the child and make happiness possible for her."

"You can have all the money you want," he says, in a shamed sort of way, that sits strangely on him; "but tell me where in America she is?"

"Why?" she asks.

'I wish to see her," he answers.

"What for?" she asks.

"What do you wish me to do?" he says finally, after a pause, in which he has not once taken his eyes from her face.

"Settle a sum of money on them," she says, "that will make them comfortable all their lives. I regret it, but it is absolutely necessary that I make myself the benefactor. I would rather not; but I have thought it all over, and know that she would not accept it except as coming from me. Then"—her eyes and face kindling with enthusiasm—"I shall, if possible, make her forget the past in the peace of the future. You know what a good woman she is, and how sweet tempered and lady-like. So few of my actions have ever borne good fruit, I am determined that this shall, and"—gently, softly, conscious of her power—"I ask you to help me."

"Ask me anything," he cries, losing his head over the look she gives him and the softness of her speech, "only don't despise me, and believe me when I swear to you that I would not let a dog suffer if I knew it."

"I believe that," she says, "only ofttimes the dog suffers and we cannot see it."

"Yes, I know what you mean," he says moodily.

"I will not thank you for what you have promised to do," she says, "because your conviction that you are doing a right, an honorable thing, will be sufficient in itself."

"My God!" he says impulsively, "if only the world had more such women as you, men would be less the devils and beasts that they are. Tell me, can you never, never bring yourself to a contemplation of a marriage with me?"

"I think not, Monsieur," she says, with an inward shudder of repugnance. Surely had she not just given a good reason for a refusal, even if there had been no others?

"Think not!" he says eagerly.

"Oh, I know not!" she says precipitately.

"You have a lover?" he says suspiciously.

"Alas, no! 'of lovers have I not one,'" she quotes. Although his presence is distasteful to her, she is thinking how instant his generosity had been.

"But you have had a lover?" he sharply interrogates.

"Oh, yes," she answers, "and the measles, and the whooping-cough, and all the other ills that childhood is heir to."

"I mean," he says desperately, "have you never loved any man?"

"No," she says, once more grave; "I am sorry to say it, but I have never loved any being on earth except Rose."

"And Céleste is going to marry her," he says.

"Never!" she cries indignantly; "and it is to frustrate these amiable intentions of Madame, and to remove Rose from her influence, that I have decided on leaving immediately. *She*" — emphasizingly — "is not one of the women who make the world better for her presence."

"You will admit that she is beautiful," he says, only with the intention to keep up this unwonted anger, which makes her so dazzlingly, dangerously beautiful to him.

"Yes," she assents, "the accursed beauty that sold Antony and Cæsar."

"You beautiful thing!" he cries hotly. "For God's sake, Kate, kiss me once. You shall, and *now*."

He is beside himself. It is but the work of an instant, and she is clasped in his arms, and his kisses lie ineffaceable, irrevocable on her lips. The instant that the deed is done, he feels the enormity of his crime. He starts back abashed, penitent, and awaiting his doom. Although hundreds and hundreds of women had been kissed by him, he had never before felt the mad, intoxicating joy that leaped through him as he felt his arms around her, and her soft breath intermingling with his. He felt like Hugo of old after the fated kiss of Parisina.

> "Who that has felt that passion's power,
> Or paused or feared in such an hour,"

and who

> "Thus has lived, fears not to die."

She does not cry out, as he expects she will, but stands white and trembling, while an exceeding anger and scorn dwell in her eyes. She cannot speak, so great is the indignation she feels. Never before has living man em-

braced her, and to think that this man (perhaps there was no worse) had held her in his arms, that his kisses had been pressed on her lips!

"You are a coward!" she says, in a cold, contemptuous tone, back of which is suppressed, concentrated fury. "Rather than be kissed and insulted by a man like you, I would go out in the public streets, and offer my face gratuitously to the multitude. You are low!"

"You are right," he says humbly. "Think of me as ill as you will. I deserve all you say, but," doggedly, "I love you. You will never know how I love you."

"Nor care to," she answers scornfully, "although your actions would prove the kind of love that you feel."

"Nonsense," he says angrily; "you know the kind of love that I feel for you. I am asking you to be my wife, and, by Heaven, you are making your refusal in the coldest, hardest, most contemptuous terms that a woman's freezing ingenuity could suggest. 'Kiss you?' Yes," fiercely, "I kissed you. Profaned you! Well, God knows it was worth it! *Why* can you not love me? You *shall* love me!" with uncon-

scious force. "I am not fit to look at you! Very well, let that be granted. Are not such men as I daily blessed with pure, good women? Look at Joseph Pierrepont, your paragon of perfection. How is he any better than I? There was not a faster man in Paris than that same Joseph."

"That is untrue," she cries indignantly, forgetting the indignity of the kiss in this last preposterous, untruthful assertion. "He is the best man I ever saw."

"He is, is he? Well, ask him, ask any one. And why should I not be as good as he? Only say," pleadingly, "that you will try to learn to care for me a little, and I swear to lead such a life of anchorite coldness that the very marble saints, not more cold than you, can but commend." Coming nearer her, he begs: "Forgive me the kiss. I know that I was a beast. I know that I am a beast. But have you no pity, womanly pity, that the fools of poets say all women possess? Forgive me! Will you?" Henri's eyes are remarkable, and however a good actor he may be generally, for once there is true regret and contrition looking from their

dark depths into the woman's. Kate realizes this, and though reluctantly, she also recognizes how willing he had been to do as she had asked him, and so answers him:

"I can but accept your apology, as I am convinced that it is sincere; but," with a little shudder, "I shall never cease to regret, as long as I live, that there was a necessity for making one."

"But I *am* forgiven?" he says, with quick gladness.

"Yes," she says hesitatingly, "you are forgiven." But there is a something in her voice that kills all this new-born gladness of his.

"And despised!" he says sullenly; "you may as well finish your sentence."

"And despised," she repeats, with cold, unlooked-for acquiescence. She had not meant to say this, but the words escaped her involuntarily. He looks at her with an expression of mingled anger and love, and it is only after a long pause that he asks abruptly, "You will see me to-morrow to make the final arrangement about — about that?" awkwardly.

"Yes," she answers. And, although it is

with an effort, she manages to say: "Although you are doing what an honorable man should do, perhaps few would have done so, and I think that what I want to say is that I think you are acting very generously."

"Faint praise that damns!" he says bitterly.

"As you like, Monsieur," she answers, with renewed coldness.

"It is not as I like; that is just it," he says fretfully; and then with a sudden passion, "but I tell you now that I shall never give you up," vehemently. "The day will come, will come, you hear, when I shall call you my wife."

"You are sanguine," she says, smiling. Although sorely distressed as she is over the interview, there is something very ludicrous to her in the idea of a marriage in which her consent is not to be asked.

"Come, let us join the others," she says, turning as she reaches the curtains, adding with characteristic humor: "Whatever they may have imagined, Monsieur, that was passing between us, I doubt much whether the most imaginative of them could come anywhere near what the reality was."

"Oh, you have then decided to make your appearance again this evening?" says Pierrepont, sarcastically, as the two come over towards the others. Céleste, with pulse beating high, is talking with false animation to Rito, and Rose is enjoying the adoration that she is having bestowed upon her by two men on her right, two on her left.

"I suppose that the affair is settled?" continues Pierrepont, adding, "Come, De Thysbaert, look a little more ecstatic. Really the occasion calls for it."

De Thysbaert flushes, and as is usual in such emergencies, it is the woman who comes to the rescue.

"On the contrary," says Miss Langdon, with her low, musical laugh, "it was I who made the proposition, and which, I am glad to say, was unhesitatingly accepted."

Céleste looks up. Henri's compressed lips and pale face, and Kate's flushed one, are not satisfactory answers to her present agitating mental query. They might mean everything. They might mean nothing. She did not care. Ah, no! Rito was very nearly as handsome as

Henri, and a great deal more devoted to her than Henri had been pleased of late to be. As for the loss of De Thysbaert? Pshaw! Was not Paris full of men ready to adore her at any moment that she might give the signal? But as for Kate, ah, that was another thing! The memory of that pleasant, threatening interview should not be allowed to sink into oblivion. Céleste would abide her time, but registered a vow in that ignoble heart of hers that the girl should pay dearly for this much talked of virtue of hers, for her threats to go to Pierrepont, and for De Thysbaert's inconstancy.

When the ladies have retired, and the men are still lingering over their cigars, Pierrepont says, half jokingly, half earnestly:

"Well, old fellow, fire ahead! Make a *confidant* of me. I don't know that I ever saw you looking as infernally blue as you do to-night."

"Damn the thing!" says De Thysbaert, as the ashes fall from his cigar, burning his hand.

"Is it as bad as that?" says Pierrepont, smiling; "she certainly could not have accepted you."

"Who says that she did?" answers De Thysbaert, shortly.

"Quite an unusual sensation, was it not, now?" continues Pierrepont, with unconcealed glee. "I knew that she would not," he adds.

"Oh, you did, did you?" says Henri, sarcastically.

"I did, for a fact; but what did she say, anyhow?" asks Pierrepont.

"Oh, go to thunder, Pierrepont, with your catechism, or if you will know, she made me see that I was the most infernal, presumptuous ass living," says De Thysbaert, bitterly.

"She did?" says Pierrepont. "Bravo for Kate! How many — twenty-nine years has it taken you to reach that conclusion? Well, well!"

"You are a pleasant friend. I will be damned if you are not," answers De Thysbaert.

"But, my dear fellow," says Pierrepont, "your discomfiture, and that at last you have actually found a woman who has snubbed you, fills me with such unbounded delight that it is nothing but our years of friendship that prevents me

from shouting the fact from the housetops. How Céleste will enjoy it!"

"Humph! Will she?" says Henri, dryly.

"Yes, poor little woman!" answers her husband; "she is very anxious to see you well married. You have no idea how much Céleste cares for you. We were talking about you the other night, and she said, in the most serious, grave way imaginable, that she thought that you ought to have a wife to keep you straight. Ah, if she only knew, my boy, what a sad, sad dog you are! I rather fancy she would not be so solicitous over 'dear Henri's welfare.'"

"At any rate, Pierrepont," says De Thysbaert, "in my character of Beelzebub, I don't pose for a Gabriel."

"I don't understand you," answers Pierrepont. "A proper appreciation of my own worth, of course, would preclude any personal application in your remark."

"Oh, yes, you are a Joseph, — a *bona fide* one," says De Thysbaert.

"Go ahead, old man," answers Pierrepont; "vent your spleen on me. My back is broad, and feelings stoically hard as adamant. I would

expect the same of you in such a case. I understand. Go ahead!" soothingly.

"I will throttle you in a moment!" says Henri.

"No, don't," answers Pierrepont. "Think of the publicity of it; and I do not think that Céleste would look well in weeds!"

"No, but," expostulated Henri, "it is such a damned unfair state of things to have a fellow as black as you are yourself set up on a pinnacle and his hoofs and horns hidden by some cursed sentimental blindness that —"

"Did she speak of me?" asks Pierrepont, with an eagerness that he himself is unconscious of. "What did she say?"

"What did she say?" repeats De Thysbaert. "Why, some infernal rot about your being too good for heaven."

"No; but, honestly?" asks Pierrepont.

"Oh, what matters it to you what she said?" answers De Thysbaert, shortly. "It was not your wife who made the remark."

"Please, Monsieur, Madame desires to see you immediately," said a servant at the door,

and all further conversation is at an end for to-night.

"How infernally blind he is!" thinks De Thysbaert, as his host goes down the hall. "How Céleste will enjoy it, eh! I would not give much for her enjoyment. Little Jezebel! And to think that my pure, beautiful darling should be sleeping under the same roof!" He forgets, with man's facility for forgetting, the impassioned vows of eternal love that he had made only a few weeks ago to Céleste. It is indeed "of man's life" a part only.

CHAPTER VI

"*L'HOMME propose et Dieu dispose*" is an ever continuous verification that the will of humanity is finite. Pierrepont comes hurrying to his wife's *boudoir* the following afternoon with a cable message in his hand, bidding the girls not start. Their uncle had suddenly died, and the physicians deemed it advisable that as soon as their aunt recovered from the prostration and shock caused by her husband's death, she should take an immediate sea voyage; would write further particulars later. A letter, coming in due time, bore the information that Mrs. Langdon would join her nieces in Paris, under the escort of Jack Mayo, Rose's lover. After Pierrepont had shown his wife the cablegram, he went in search of Kate, finding her, as usual, in the library.

"I have bad news for you," he says, not knowing how she will take it.

"Yes; what is it?" she asks calmly, going on with her writing.

"I have just received a cable message from America," he says.

"From whom?" she asks, looking up quickly. "Jack Mayo?"

"No; it was sent at your aunt's dictation. Your — your uncle is dead," he says.

"Uncle Henry?" she asks, in a low, hushed voice.

Her cool reception of it annoys him.

"Yes, your uncle," he says.

"Poor Aunt May! She loved him so well!" she says slowly.

"Is that all you have to say?" he asks, a little coldly.

"All I have to say?" she repeats wonderingly. "What do you mean?"

"Have you no regret to express, not one tear to shed for this man, who doubtlessly has been a father to you?" he asks.

She looks up at him intently, rather bewildered. This cold displeasure and gravity she has never seen before, and she resents its application to herself.

"I do not understand you," she says quietly; "I am very sorry for Aunt May. I cannot cry. He was very kind and good to me always, but I never loved Uncle Henry. One cannot love when one does not feel! And the false assumption of either does not seem right to me."

"You *are* ice!" he says, looking at her strangely; and with no further words he leaves her.

She attempts to go on with her writing, but his words keep ringing in her ears, and she throws the pen down with a short little laugh, and goes up to her own room. Rose, coming in from her ride, her cheeks flushed and her eyes brilliant, is also told the news. The absence of sympathy, or whatever you wish to call it, in Miss Langdon, is certainly not lacking here. Rose instantly goes off into hysterical fits of weeping, disfiguring and reddening her pretty face. Her grief is most poignant, incapable of consolation. She rushes up to her sister's room and sheds copious tears in a melodramatic attitude on Miss Langdon's bosom. But that evening at dinner she is the gayest,

brightest little woman at the table, dining with a relish which was appetizing itself to look at. Pierrepont, who witnessed her grief with approbation, feels a little skeptical at this later performance; and he notices, too, that Kate is quieter than is her wont, and excuses herself early. Upstairs in her room Miss Langdon is telling Brooks that the outlook for a speedy return to America is not very propitious, and then she speaks of the woman whom she has rescued.

"Where is she now, Brooks?" she asks.

"Poor dear soul, asleep, Miss. Oh, Miss Kate, if she has not had her trouble! Last night in her sleep she did nothing but sigh, and sigh, and sing to her baby all night," said Brooks.

"I know," says the girl, softly, wistfully. "She is unhappy without her child. We must arrange to let her be with it until we finally take her and it with us back to America. Ah, Brooks! I know it was God himself who made me stop that night to speak to her."

"'Ice woman' they call her, do they?" thinks Brooks, watching the white-clad figure kneeling

at her prayers. "Little they know about it, God bless the child!"

"What has become of that new maid, Kate?" asks Rose, a few days later.

"She was not well," answers Miss Langdon; "I have sent her home until she gets better."

"Pshaw, Kate! Who was she?" says Rose.

"I am telling you the truth," answers her sister.

"Well," says Rose, "at any rate, there was something very mysterious about that girl, and I believe you know just what it is. *I*," scornfully, "knew that she was no servant. Come, what quixotic, philanthropical scheme have you on hand now?"

"Merely this," answers Miss Langdon, "you are right; she is not a servant, but an unfortunate, good woman, whom I have been able to assist a little. And I hope that you have confidence enough in my judgment not to ask any other questions."

"Don't look so serious and I will not," says Rose; "but, Kate, some of those awful expressions that you are capable of are simply harrowing! But see here, Miss Solomon, wise

as you are, don't let your pity or compassion get the better of this much-boasted judgment."

"Rose, you turning mentor!" laughs her sister. "Ye gods, what next? Allow me to offer —"

"Stuff!" answers this young lady. Then, with a little hesitancy of manner, she adds: "Kate, are you not glad that Aunt May is coming?"

Jack Mayo's name had not been mentioned between them since that memorable interview, whose sequel was so disastrous to Céleste's carefully laid plans.

"Yes, I am glad that Aunt May is coming."

Then, continues Rose, "and Ja — Jack will be company for her," weakly betraying that she wants to talk of Jack.

Miss Langdon vouchsafes no answer.

"Kate, do you know why some people hate you?" asks the young lady.

"Do people hate me?" says Miss Langdon, smiling.

"Yes, of course they do," answers Rose, "and it is only because — because you are so hateful!" ignominously.

"Logical and tautological," suggests Miss Langdon.

"I don't care!" defiantly from Rose.

"You spoke of Jack?" finally says Miss Langdon, generously.

"Yes," beamingly from Rose. "Kate, do you think that he will find me much changed?"

"Decidedly!" emphatically answers Miss Langdon.

"Why?" asks Rose.

"Well," replies Miss Langdon, slowly, "you have lost most of your good looks," teasingly, "and, although I am sorry to admit it, your temper shows no visible improvement."

"You are simply devilish, Kate!" says Rose.

"But," adds Miss Langdon, "you have gained one new attraction to your legionary accomplishments. As Madame Pierrepont would say, 'You can swear with the utmost *naïveté*.'"

"Now, Kate, please!" says Rose, reproachfully.

"Well," answers Miss Langdon, "but what do you wish? Oh, if you are manœuvring to find out how much I shall tell Jack, why, it

amounts to just this. I shall be the first to greet him, and the instant that my sisterly embraces are through with, I shall begin: 'Rose? Oh, yes, she is quite well. You have just come in time for her marriage. The prospective groom has not much claim to physical beauty, but his financial attractions are unparalleled. It is the custom of the country, you know.'" Then, in an explanatory tone, "I shall proceed to put in the details in order to give a full, comprehensive version of the affair. I hope you recognize my sisterly generosity?"

"Kate," exclaims Rose, running over and throwing her arms around her, "I just believe that you would!" Her only grain of comfort is the suppressed twinkle in her sister's eyes.

"I might be open to bribery," suggests Miss Langdon.

"Well?" eagerly from Rose.

"Do you agree?" asks Miss Langdon.

"Oh, yes, yes, gladly," answers Rose.

"Are you positive, Rose?" says Miss Langdon.

"Yes, honest, Kate! Go on," answers Rose.

"Well," says Kate Langdon, "what caused

you that day to ask me about Joseph Pierrepont and myself?"

"Oh," says Rose, coloring, "nothing. Please, Kate, do not bring that up again. I know that I was odious."

"But what made you say it?" persists Miss Langdon.

"Oh, nothing at all," answers Rose, "except that I wanted to be disagreeable."

"Rose," says her sister, sternly, "if you do not tell me this instant where such an idea came from, — I know you too well to be made to believe that it was original, — I will retract my promise, and will tell Jack not only all that I know, but as much more as my ingenuity can devise!"

This awful threat has its effect, and Rose hastens to say:

"Well, it was only this: Céleste asked me if it were not a good joke?"

"What a good joke?" asks Kate, sharply.

"Why," says Rose, "your mutual devotion."

"Oh," says Miss Langdon. "Well?"

"And then," says Rose, "I heard two or

three people — now, Kate, don't get angry, because you asked me yourself to tell you."

"Well, go on," says Miss Langdon.

"Well, then," says Rose, "people were talking about you both that night at the English Legation ball. You know that you danced with Pierrepont three times consecutively."

"Well, is he not my cousin?" says Miss Langdon.

"Yes," replies Rose, "but — oh, pshaw! there is nothing more."

"There is, and you shall tell me," says Miss Langdon, determinedly, her eyes bent on Rose's. "Tell me all that you have heard."

"Open the door then," says Rose, "so as to give me a chance to escape should your rage incline you to turn and rend me on the spot. I heard Henri de Thysbaert and Monsieur Rito in the smoking — "

"And you listened? Oh, Rose!" interrupts her sister, scornfully.

"Oh, yes, I listened," says Rose, unabashed; "and when I heard your name, my dear sister, I listened still more. They said that Joseph was in love with you, and did not yet know it

himself. Then De Thysbaert said that if he (Joseph) were, you were not. And Rito replied that he was not so sure of that, because what would explain your open preference for Pierrepont, your ever ready smile of welcome for him, your frequent *tête-à-têtes*, his omnipresence as your escort, and Céleste's inability to aid her clever, learned husband where you do, your repeated refusals of good matches? Altogether — "

"Altogether they are fools!" says Kate, indignantly, her eyes flashing.

"I thought so," says Rose; "*voilà le cyclone!*" unceremoniously bolting for the door, calling after her, "I will return as soon as I think that the storm has subsided."

When she does return, Miss Langdon looks up smiling, and asks about some plans that they have for the evening. In her calmer moments, the whole thing seems rather a huge joke to her, and she thinks of telling Pierrepont, it is so amusing; but he is never told.

Mrs. Langdon will join her nieces sometime during the present month. Pierrepont is boyishly elated over their enforced delay; Céleste,

of course, equally delighted. De Thysbaert had called the following day, but Miss Langdon was engaged with visitors, so, in order not to appear to be wanting in delicacy, he had sent by messenger, for her inspection, the papers of the deeds and settlements. The amount of the gifts exceeds her most sanguine expectations. She necessarily feels, as she greets him in the evening, that he has done this for her sake; and her heart softens a little towards him. But as she feels the prolonged pressure of his hand the old wave of repulsion sweeps over her with renewed force. She again sees in him only the destroyer of the peace of the man who, if she does not love, comes next to her sister in her regard.

There is a large ball to-night, and the usual number of attendants surround the three women as they wait in the hall below. Rito and De Thysbaert are there, and, as always, several other friends of Pierrepont. Rose is carrying on rather more than a mild flirtation with a young Englishman, which Kate, with amused distress, sees will culminate in an offer and a rejection. Rose's love escapades and affairs have a strong

element of the tragic, as well as the ludicrous in them. Céleste is looking very beautiful to-night in her pale draperies, her diamonds flashing, and her innocent, childish, *spirituelle* face all aglow. Rito quite loses his head in the contemplation of all her charms. He is one of the few men indifferent to Miss Langdon's attractions. Beauty he accedes her, but of too glacial, cold a type to suit his taste. He likes something warm, loving, passionate! It was only the Galateas infused with life who were acceptable to him. Pierrepont, as usual, asks his cousin for the first dance, and is not a little surprised when he relinquishes her to her next partner, saying, "Kate, I will be back for the next," to have her reply, "No, do not; I am engaged for that."

"You forget," he says, surprised; "it is our 'Stephanie.'"

"No," she answers; "but I cannot dance it with you."

"Oh, as you like, but I shall demand future explanation," he says laughingly; "I do not relish being thrown over for any of these other fellows."

He goes off smiling, wondering, nevertheless, to himself why she should have demurred dancing with him.

"I wonder," he thinks suddenly, and the thought is not pleasant to him, "whether she wanted to keep it for De Thysbaert. Surely she cannot entertain any serious thoughts there; De Thysbaert is a good enough fellow, but, Heavens! what a sacrilegious shame a marriage between them would be! It would be pollution itself!"

He looks around for his wife, but finding her the centre of an admiring group of men, he does not like to intrude. De Thysbaert runs against him at this moment, and inquires, "Where is Miss Langdon?" and is answered, a trifle shortly, "Somewhere in the dancing-room, I suppose."

"It was he," he thinks.

To satisfy his curiosity, he goes back to the ball-room just in time to see Miss Langdon rise and take De Thysbaert's arm, and join the dancers.

"What will women not do for position and money?" he thinks to himself.

Seeing his wife at this moment, who has come in with her partner for a dance, the frown on his face disappears, giving place to smiles, as he thinks, with fond pride, "Dear little girl! *There* is one whom nothing can corrupt!"

He dances the next dance with her, and Céleste, who is passionately fond of dancing, laughingly declares that her husband is at his best in a ball-room. Rito has followed his liege-lady into the dancing-room, indifferent to the comments and curiosity that his increasing devotion is causing on all sides. He is content if eventually victory is to be his. He gladly obeys Céleste's signal to relieve her of her husband, and in a few moments joins her alone. Pierrepont sees Miss Langdon later in one of the aside rooms with De Thysbaert. He does not hesitate to join them, and although there is not a very hearty welcome, either in words or in expression, from De Thysbaert, this seems a fact of no importance.

"This will not do, my children, will not do!" he says disapprovingly. "Kate, do you know what Paris is saying? That you are actually

going to show the bad taste of accepting this worthless fellow!"

"Paris is very wise!" she laughs, "and it seems to me willing at any time to sacrifice people and truth for novelty!"

"Then it is not true?" he says, with feigned suspense.

"It is a case of 'Nobody asked you, kind sir, she said,'" she replies smilingly; "but, *mon cousin*, it certainly was amusing! I came in here to escape from the heat. Not a maiden all forlorn, as there were no fewer than five men with me. The sixth appears, Monsieur De Thysbaert, and lo! I suddenly find myself alone with him. Evidently Paris has some such idea as you have just suggested. And how absurd it is! Monsieur de Thysbaert, I dare say, would as little wish such a thing to be reported as I would. Come, *mon ami!* I danced the last waltz with Monsieur de Thysbaert, hence the next is impossible with him. I would not," condescendingly, "dance with either of you for yourselves, you know. But these *bête* Frenchmen do dance so horribly, and trample so on one's feet, that I am only too glad to have

either of you ask me. I repeat, not that you dance so well, but less atrociously than the others."

"We won't die of flattery, at any rate," Pierrepont says as Miss Langdon rises, adding, "Now, Henri, *mon cher*, there is a pretty, baby-faced little girl over there with Lady Dashington,—the one with the pink arms and blue eyes. She has been watching you all the evening, apparently has seen nothing but you. Go over and give her the satisfaction of a closer proximity to the 'women's god!'"

"That is not fair in Pierrepont, is it, Miss Langdon?" says De Thysbaert.

"Shall I ride home in your carriage?" in a lower tone, he asks.

"Certainly," says Pierrepont, aloud, "we shall be *so* pleased to have you! won't we, Kate?"

"I am so glad that you came when you did," she says, when they are alone. "Have you seen Rose?"

"Yes," he answers, "about half an hour ago, when she was successfully re—e—ducing poor Heathcote into one prolonged sigh."

"Oh, dear! I wish she would not care for

that kind of thing!" she says, half laughingly, half earnestly.

"And you?" he asks coolly; "you, too, seem capable of deriving considerable amusement from that same kind of sport!"

"Yes," she asks, "you think so?"

"Assuredly," he replies, "especially when a young lady saves an especial dance."

"Yes," she repeats, smiling, determined against argument or explanation. It seemed so nonsensical to tell Joseph Pierrepont that she had been affected to the extent of not dancing with him by the ill-natured remarks of some old woman.

"You did save it for De Thysbaert, then?" he says.

"What?" she asks.

"Why, the dance!" he says impatiently.

"Oh, of course! Why?" she answers.

"Oh, nothing," he replies, "only I rather wonder at your taste."

"Why, what do you mean?" she says wonderingly.

"That you allow too many of his attentions unless you intend to accept them," he replies.

"Nothing is further from my thoughts," she says.

"Well, I should hope not," he replies; "he is capable of making any woman miserable."

"What a good friend you are!" she suggests.

"Oh, no," he says hastily, "I don't want to say anything against De Thysbaert, but he is the last man on the face of the earth to whom I should care to intrust the happiness of any one dear to me."

"Your wife likes him," says Miss Langdon.

"Oh, yes," he says. "Dear child! she would like to reform him."

"Is he, think you, so in need of it?" asks the girl.

"Yes, doubtlessly; but the efforts of all the good women in the world would never effect it in his case," he answers.

"And yet to-night," she says, not without some scorn in her voice, "you will receive him and give him the hand of good-fellowship."

"Yes, but that is the necessity of the false, conventional society we live in," he answers.

"Or rather," she says, "the hypocrisy of the society we live in."

"Oh, I see that you are his champion," he says.

"No," she answers coldly. "But enough of this! Have you those proof sheets ready for revision in the morning?"

Then they fall to discussing the probable happy results of their past co-labor.

The days pass, absorbing time, until there remain but two days before the anticipated arrival of Mrs. Langdon and Jack Mayo. De Thysbaert's infatuation for Kate has only increased. They are, everything considered, quite good friends. His "digression" from Céleste has by this time become public property, and Paris is at present divided in opinion as to whether he means marriage or amusement. The work goes on in the library during the mornings as usual. Pierrepont is a little annoyed by the increased persistency of De Thysbaert in his unsuccessful suit, and says to Miss Langdon, one morning in the library, —

"De Thysbaert certainly must be a fool!"

"Why?" she asks smilingly, "because he thinks that he is in love with me?"

"Nonsense!" says Pierrepont, "but has n't he sense and experience to see when there is not a ghost of a chance for him? He must annoy you. Well?" interrogative impatience.

"No," she answers, "he rather amuses me."

"Amuses you?"

"Yes," she says, "because I really think that he is in earnest."

"Unquestionably," he says dryly, and then, after a pause, "Well, what are you going to do with him?"

"Do with him?" she says laughingly, "why, nothing!"

"Nothing?" he says, a trifle warmly. "You mean then, that you are going to go on permitting him to hang around you as he does, compromising you by his attentions, and sullying your name by having his coupled with it?"

She looks up quickly, with that rare, odd gleam in her eyes. But its existence is only for a second, as she says calmly:

"I met him here, at your house. Since you do not think that he is a fit associate, I wonder at your not dismissing him."

"You can do that more effectively than I, Kate," he says.

"I do not agree with you," she answers coolly.

"Reject him," he says decidedly, "with no extenuating provisos."

"What Solons you men are!" she says, amused; "rather advise an acceptance, if you really would be well rid of him. That, and that alone, would destroy the poignancy of his present ardor."

"Accept him? God forbid!" says Pierrepont, with low, vehement fervor; "no, my child, never, never that!"

"No, never that!" she repeats, her voice unconsciously taking the same tone as his.

"I wonder whether you ever will marry, Kate, whether there is a man on earth worthy of such a woman as you?"

His eyes are resting questioningly on her face, and a half troubled, unconscious sigh escapes him.

"I do not know," she answers dreamily, "but if I should ever love any one, there is a feeling in my heart that it would be a love that

would bring me pain. See how I love Rose! and yet it is a love fraught ever with anxiety, lest I shall fail in my duty towards her."

"Yes, Duty and Love should be synonymes," he answers; but it is plain that he is not thinking of what he is saying, as his next remark proves.

"You are one of those women," he is saying slowly, half to himself, — "one of those women who would consider life well lost, self-sacrifice nothing, if the result would be a noble action. I mean, that you would sacrifice your own happiness if by so doing you could insure the happiness of others."

"I try to do right," she says softly, and there is a something in her voice and in her eyes that he has never seen or heard before. It moves him strangely. A feeling comes over him that there has been given him a glimpse of the inner woman, the noble, generous, almost divine soul that she really possesses. In the years that come, how his prophecy is verified! And she, *she* never forgets the words that he has just uttered.

"Thérèse, have you given all orders neces-

sary for the comfort of these savages who are coming?" Madame Pierrepont is asking her maid, a day prior to the arrival of the Americans. "Pshaw, what fools we have been!" with a petulant gesture of impatience. "And my liege-lord! what a stupid, domesticated Benedict he has become! *Grand Dieu*, Thérèse! another year of this would be the death of me!"

"Monsieur Rito *est très comme il faut*, Madame," says sly Thérèse, feeling her ground.

"Not bad," from her mistress, in a slightly pleasanter, nearer mollified tone. Then, after a long pause:

"I would give my head, not that its contents has done me much good lately, but nothing," warmly, "would give me keener gratification than to torture that woman!"

"Mlle. Langdon?" interrogatively, from Thérèse.

"Yes," says Céleste, "make her suffer, watch her suffer; put her on the rack, and keep her there."

"Nothing easier, Madame," from this very accommodating of maids.

"How?" asks Céleste.

"Through *la petite*," says Thérèse.

"Oh, poor little beggar," answers Céleste; "I have worried her enough."

"*Chacun pour soi, et Dieu pour nous tous*," says Thérèse.

"Yes," assents her mistress. "I wonder," musingly, "what this lover of Rose's is like?"

Then follows a long conversation between mistress and maid, and a considerable amount of deviltry is concocted in the daintily scented boudoir in the space of a very few minutes.

A telegram is sent to the girls telling the exact hour of their aunt's arrival, but it is not until twenty-four hours later that the despatch reaches its legitimate destination. Surely this is not duplicity, but extreme solicitude in Céleste's beautiful face, as she tells the girls that their anxiety is unfounded. The steamer, of course, had been delayed a day in reaching Havre, and so they one and all reconcile themselves to the morrow.

"Which rooms have they given him?" asks Céleste of Thérèse, while the other ladies are in their rooms resting for the evening.

And what vision is this that moves with swift, elastic steps along, — this vision, with the sparkling, gleaming eyes, this red-lipped woman, fairer than any Venus, this incarnation of loveliness? It is Céleste, Céleste enveloped in one of the most bewitching *negligées* of lace that has ever been produced, her Hebean feet and ankles discarding the shoes, that are indeed a distraction. She looks like a veritable Aphrodite, ready for her first plunge in Poseidon's arms. Her firm, moulded bosoms are half exposed, while their undulations seasick one with soft ecstasy. How fair she is, how devilish! Why *does* the Almighty make so many fair things so foul? Thérèse discreetly follows her mistress. Both women are evidently very much amused, and Thérèse is saying, her little black eyes snapping:

"*Oh, pauvre enfant! pauvre enfant! que j'ai pitié pour vous!*"

The room has been prepared for Jack Mayo. Céleste throws herself down on a divan. Thérèse takes down the long, luxurious hair, arranging its sweep with artistic knowledge. (She had done so once or twice before.)

"*Vous êtes ravissante*, Madame!" she exclaims. "The poor man will burn to ashes at sight of you!" and with an amused, backward glance, she goes out, closing the door softly.

"I wonder how long I shall have to wait?" soliloquizes Céleste.

"This way, sir! These are the rooms reserved for you!" she hears one of the obsequious servants saying. Heavens! Suppose the servant should enter, and come through to the adjoining room where she is lying! This fear is unfounded, she knows, as soon as she hears a very masculine voice, apparently addressing space, saying, "Devilish strange! I don't understand it all. My darling little girl! Why did you not meet me!" his face softening. He starts towards the other room. Céleste quickly closes her eyes, turning to expose a little more of the left shoulder, which, unlike Katishaw's, is like a piece of carved marble. Nearer and nearer he comes, his objective point evidently being the window. He does not see her yet, nor yet. One step more forward, and now he does.

"Great Heavens!" is the low exclamation that escapes him.

Not an eyelash of hers flutters. The white tempting bosoms rise and fall in rhythm to her regular breathing. He is only a man, remember, and he stands like one entranced. He has been a pretty moral fellow, and the sight before him is of sufficiently rare and novel a nature almost to make him lose his head for an instant. He is quickly recalled to earth again, and thinking that he had made a mistake, looks around for means of escape. He takes one more look, however, and the blood rushes to his head as he does so. He stops in consternation. The white arm moves a little, and a soft, childish sigh comes from the half-parted lips.

"My God! if she should awaken, and find me here!" The thought almost kills him. What explanation could he, should he give? How Céleste is laughing! It is as much as she can do to stifle it. Beads of perspiration stand out on the man's face. Poor devil! what a predicament he truly is in! She moves again; this time there can be no mistake. He

hastily conceals himself, "a peeping Tom," behind the thick curtain, hoping that she will make her exit, which example he determines speedily to follow.

"Are you there, darling?" asks a voice, soft as a cooing bird. She half rises, her hair enveloping what nature seems loath to expose. A something rises in the man's throat, back of the curtain. Well does she know where he is. With a languid movement, grace itself, she advances toward the window, takes hold of the curtain, and in a moment has fallen against him. How adroitly managed! A little startled cry, an outstretching of arms, and she has fainted. Oh, vile Céleste! They are his arms that have perforce caught her. With assumed unconsciousness, she lay there, her nudity every moment making him less and less the man and more and more the beast. At last she opens the lovely eyes, and, with a well-assimilated shudder, closes them again. Rather a trying position for the poor fellow. God knows what he *ought* to have done. What he *did* do, was to kiss the warm, throbbing bosom, lying in such close abandon upon his shoulder. Thus ever strive

A little startled cry, an outstretching of arms, and she has fainted

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the soul and the body. Céleste, at this last move, decided that it was time for action. She looks up at him, looks long at him, dazed, of course, just returning to consciousness. Then says, softly, —

"Are *you Jack?*"

She sees the honest surprise, and changes her tactics at once. Springing to her feet with theatrical perfectness, she cries excitedly:

"Where am I? Oh, my God! look at me! Oh, what is to be done? What is to be done? Oh, I did not know —" she moans. "For Heaven's sake, tell me that you believe me! I did not know. Oh, I thought it was to-morrow that you were coming. I only came in to rest. I — I —" her head hung ashamed, and he, poor simple fool, quite believes all these incoherent, unintelligible explanations, whatever they may be, and suddenly feels that he has no longer any claims to being a *gentleman.*

Later explanations and apologies *ad infinitum* of course follow in quick succession, not helping matters much, but necessarily natural to the circumstances. When Céleste finally does get to her room, she is convulsed with

laughter, and the two women have a merry time over the poor fellow's discomfiture, and the probable results of the interview.

"He saw me, at any rate," says the mistress to the maid. "I fancy that it will take him some little time to forget *that!*"

Jack does feel ashamed of himself, only to feel more so an hour later, when he holds for the second time in his arms to-day a woman, but this time the woman for whom he not only feels passion, but a love that will last and pass over into eternity. He gravely acknowledges his introduction to his hostess, Madame Pierrepont, and, to do the man justice, his hot passion was but an ephemeral moment, — everything considered, not to be wondered at. Céleste is vastly amused. Mrs. Langdon, as all strangers, and moderately unobserving people, are apt to be, is rather prepossessed with Céleste, and tells Miss Langdon, "My dear, she spoke so beautifully of my loss."

It was decided that Jack's and Rose's wedding should take place at an early date, as the young fellow's business would not permit of

too long a holiday. He has studiously avoided his hostess, addressing her only when the occasion absolutely called for it. Jack was a pretty good fellow, still no fool, and several little conversations with Kate had rather opened his eyes, quickened by his own observation, to the existing state of affairs in the Pierrepont household. It also had a tendency to make him look more leniently on his own conduct, on a certain memorable occasion. Céleste rather increased her efforts towards his subjugation, but the critical moment had passed, and he saw her just as she was, — a very beautiful courtesan. De Thysbaert, not without some success, had tried to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Langdon. He is just on the eve of success, when Miss Langdon incidentally confides to her aunt his treachery to the woman who had loved him. A decided change takes place at once in the old lady's manner. He is quick to perceive it, and — wretch! — to be amused by it. He has quite made up his mind to marry the one woman to whom he has proposed marriage. It is, or he thinks that it is, his one real *grande passion*, and he does not intend to be thwarted.

The time for the wedding arrives. A most sumptuous affair it is. All the Paris journals are full of it, and little Rose is pleased beyond measure at the stir it has caused. The young couple go off by themselves for a little while, very much in love, very happy. Miss Langdon and her aunt will go all through the south of France, and when Mrs. Langdon, who is under her physician's orders, is able, they will return to America. The woman who should have been Henri de Thysbaert's wife will accompany them. It is the morning before their departure. Miss Langdon is in the study, busy at work, looking over the proof sheets of the last volume of Pierrepont's work. Mrs. Langdon is sitting with them, knitting.

"No, I really do not know what I shall do without Kate," Pierrepont is saying for the hundredth time.

"But we have almost finished," she answers brightly.

"Yes," absently from him.

Mrs. Langdon looks proudly at her niece, and wonders whether there ever was a brighter woman.

"You will stop some weeks on your way back?" Pierrepont says finally.

"Hardly weeks," answers Mrs. Langdon; "we go from here to Nantes, and after that we have planned such an extensive programme that I fear we shall have little time; but as Céleste seems so anxious, we will certainly make an effort to stop a few days."

"A few days?" he says suddenly, as though just realizing it; "why, then this *is* good-bye. Kate, I don't want you to go."

Mrs. Langdon looks up over her glasses.

"And I am not sure that I want to go now," Kate answers.

Mrs. Langdon looks up again, not uneasily, but her niece's face reflects nothing but the usual calm indifference.

"I owe you so much," he continues. His eyes have reached hers, and seem unable to leave them.

"Do not talk of owing," she says earnestly; "believe me, it is we who can never cancel the obligation we are under to you."

"You owe me nothing," he says, "but I owe you great happiness."

"It strikes me that you are a very humble and self-deprecative pair," suggests Mrs. Langdon, *sotto voce*, for some reason not altogether approving the turn the conversation has taken.

"I suppose the next time that I see her Kate will be married, Aunt May?" says Pierrepont.

"I hope so," the other woman answers fervently. "I know of no woman calculated to make a better wife and mother than she."

Miss Langdon smiles. It is rather a question what her thoughts may be. It is some time before she says anything, and then, turning to her aunt, but looking at Pierrepont, she asks:

"And you would advise it, then?"

"No!" shortly, emphatically from him.

"Why not, pray?" she asks, but showing no surprise.

"I do not think that you will find a man worthy of you — a man who would understand your character," he says.

"Is it so very complex, then?" she asks, smiling.

"Very," he replies, with no answering smile.

"How he looks at her!" thinks Mrs. Langdon, "and yet he is so openly devoted to his

wife! and, Kate! oh, even if it were so, Kate would stand none of that nonsense."

Yet, as her niece leaves the room, she sees how the man's eyes follow her, and wisely concludes that it is best that she came. After they have left him, Joseph Pierrepont sits thinking, when a sudden, swift color rises to his forehead, dyeing it crimson.

"I believe that I love her!" he says hoarsely, inarticulately, and his face is suddenly pale, hard, and stern.

They leave the next day, and amidst the bustle and hurry of departure, little opportunity exists for any pathetic leave-taking. De Thysbaert openly avows his intention of appearing at Nantes in a day or so.

"He is certainly a very handsome man!" thinks Mrs. Langdon. "It is a pity that Kate, or any one, in fact, should know so much to his discredit."

Miss Langdon bids them all a very cheerful good-bye. Plainly, she is not breaking her heart at leaving. Céleste whispers in her ear:

"Do not think too badly of me. Surely you have had your way in everything."

Finally, they are gone, and Pierrepont rides back with his wife in her coupé, a proceeding evidently unlooked for by Rito, who, probably for the first time, recognizes that husbands have some rights that it is impossible, as well as unwise, to contend against. Pierrepont knocks at his wife's room at the early hour of four the following afternoon. Rito has not been gone five minutes.

"Heavens, Thérèse! What does he want at this hour?" whispers Céleste. But on his admission, it seems that he does not want anything in particular.

"I felt lonely," he explains. "Say, Céleste, I wish that you would read me something, and perhaps if I lie down here I can go to sleep!"

Mistress and maid exchange glances of comical horror. Céleste is so thoroughly amused that she allows herself to laugh outright.

"But, *mon cher*," she argues, "I have an engagement at eight, and it is four now."

"Can't you give it up, pet, for me?" he asks.

"Oh, certainly, if you really wish it," she answers, while she scribbles on a piece of paper, and hands it to Thérèse:

"Get rid of him, somehow, at once."

Thérèse soon leaves the room. So great is the confidence that Madame places in her maid that she sits down to graciously comply with her husband's wish, saying, sweetly:

"Well, dear, what shall I read?"

She has hardly begun before a servant knocks at her door with a telegram, after reading which Pierrepont says:

"It is too bad, darling, that our afternoon should be spoilt. This is from Richards," holding it towards her; "I ought to have gotten it two hours ago. He is down at the embassy, and even now may be gone before I can get there" — which he certainly was, as he had never been there.

Regularly, each day, Pierrepont goes in the afternoon to his wife's rooms, and even suggested once that she should come every morning for an hour or so to his study, and help him with his writings. To this she agreed, but intentionally made herself so stupid, and made so many mistakes, that he was glad to relieve her. He loved his wife devotedly, and the admission that he had made to himself and his

God only, had caused him hours of remorse, loathing of self, self-abnegation, self-despicableness. It was an ever-present torture to him since the moment that it had come to him, in its overwhelming force and truth. No change had taken place in his heart towards his wife. Not a whit less devotedly or passionately did he love her! This other new, strange feeling, that he would willingly have strangled in its birth, he could not, did not understand. Plato once said (and it was not the only lie that he told either), that a man's heart was capable of loving two women with the same amount of fervency and constancy. This is never possible. Mentally, Pierrepont had waged a long struggle against this feeling that had gradually taken possession of him. He had not only fought against it, but stubbornly denied even its existence, until at last the manhood in him rebelled, and cried aloud against such self-deception. Had he understood his wife, he would have understood his position. It was, as I have said before, the ideal Céleste, not the actual, who possessed his heart. His contempt for himself at this juncture was unbounded. He could not

do enough for his wife. He seemed such a weak, contemptible, ignoble creature to himself! And all the time the man's heart was hungry for a sight of the woman who, against his will, possessed his life. Paris still continued to laugh over his blindness, and Rito was openly congratulated on his success.

Pierrepont informed his wife one morning that business would call him away for a couple of weeks, and gave it, as his advice, that it would be pleasanter for her to join Mrs. Langdon and Kate, who were at Trouville, during his absence. Céleste demurred a little at this at first, but as her mother was too far away to consult, soon saw the wisdom of complying. At Trouville, Jack and his bride had joined Mrs. Langdon. De Thysbaert had carried out his threat, and allowed only twenty-four hours to intervene before the maid saw his name on the register. It made it rather awkward, as Mrs. Langdon had taken a great fancy to Kate's *protégée* and her little boy, and insisted upon having them with her. However, so far, no *contretemps* had occurred. Miss Langdon admits that there is no place in

her estimation in France like Paris. She is not looking quite herself, and Mrs. Langdon does not hesitate to say that it is due to the confinement in the library. Miss Langdon evidently has become reconciled to De Thysbaert's presence, and all the gossips at Trouville have decided that it will be *une vraie affaire!* Unquestionably, as far as he was concerned, it would be. It was marvellous, the change that had taken place in the man. Even Miss Langdon, who was least willing to see anything admirable in him, was compelled to admit that he was not only different, but sincerely reformed. He was a bright fellow, and merely as an acquaintance she had begun rather to enjoy his presence. He noticed that she was more tolerant of him, and on this really only baseless fabric he built sanguine hopes that were never to be realized. The day after Rose's arrival, who was as happy and contented as possible, the sisters were alone.

"Kate, you are looking miserable," kindly suggested Mrs. Mayo, *née* Rose Langdon.

"Thanks," coolly from Miss Langdon. "I do not agree with you."

"But you are, all the same," sententiously from Rose.

"What seems to be the matter with me?" asks her sister.

"Shall I tell you?" asks Rose, slowly, looking steadily at her.

"*Mais oui*," laughingly says Miss Langdon.

"You miss Joseph Pierrepont," says Mrs. Mayo, shortly.

"I think that I do, Rose," she answers, in no way amazed at the unexpectedness of the remark; "in fact, I am sure that I do. I do not think there is any misery equalling that of having nothing to do. You see, I was so busy there, with the book—"

"It is not that," interrupts Rose, "it is not *that* that you miss. You miss *him*. You are blind, Kate Langdon! You are in love with that man. Oh, I saw it long ago!"

"Rose!" exclaims her sister.

"Oh, you can 'Rose' as much as you like," says Rose. "The fact remains, and that is what is making you ill. It 's no use talking to me, Kate, or getting indignant either. Just think it over, and question your

own heart, and see whether I am not right. You — are — in — love — with — him. Now you have it, there!" And the young lady sails out of the room, colors flying.

"Rose is crazy!" she is saying to herself, the proud, pale face flushed. "I love him?" scornfully. "Would she have me," indignantly, "as low as those other women, as low as Céleste herself, that I should stoop to love another woman's husband? I? Oh, no! Can they not see that he is my friend, my best friend, whom I revere and honor. But love as I should not, ah, no! But if I ever love a man," she thinks to herself, "he will not be unlike Joseph Pierrepont."

She repeats to Mrs. Langdon Rose's extraordinary speech, and Mrs. Langdon, on the whole, is rather glad that she has done so.

When the news comes that Céleste intends joining them, each receives the information differently. De Thysbaert says, "What new deviltry is she up to now?" Miss Langdon thinks, "What can it possibly mean?" Mrs. Langdon feels, "I shall be so pleased to have Céleste with us." Jack and Rose are indiffer-

ence supreme. Céleste's presence, with Thérèse, explains Pierrepont's absence. Perhaps the only one surprised at Monsieur Rito's appearance, the following evening, is Mrs. Langdon, who asks whether Rito is "any relation of Pierrepont's," and is answered by that wretch of a De Thysbaert:

"Oh, no, only by marriage, Madame."

Miss Langdon looks disapproval, but Rose, taking advantage of her newly acquired dignity, laughs uproariously.

"What is she laughing at?" asks Mrs. Langdon, innocently.

"As usual, at nothing," answers Miss Langdon.

Céleste certainly has the faculty of enjoying herself in whatever state she may find herself. She carries everything with a high hand. Jack Mayo looks askance at her, and nothing annoys him more than to have Rose express admiration or fondness for Céleste.

Trouville is not the gayest place in the world, as everybody knows who has been there. De Thysbaert, by sheer determination, contrives to monopolize most of Miss Langdon's time.

Rito and Céleste are conspicuously inseparable. The newly married couple are, of course, "a world unto themselves." Mrs. Langdon finds most comfort in the companionship of that gentle-eyed, low-toned woman, who, with her little boy, keeps strictly to herself, but is ever ready with her service and sweet sympathy. The child's resemblance to De Thysbaert is wonderful. The little fellow has even the peculiar carriage of the father, and is a very handsome child. One evening, as Miss Langdon and De Thysbaert are sitting in the main corridor, Céleste and Rito having gone to one of the smaller salons, some one passes the first couple, just as Miss Langdon is laughingly answering some badinage of Henri's. De Thysbaert leans over, to whisper more seriously, when Miss Langdon springs to her feet, with a sudden cry, her face aglow with happy surprise.

"Oh, it is *he*, Joseph!" she cries, and before the happy light has left her face he turns and sees it.

Joseph Pierrepont arrived a week before he was expected. That they are mutually glad to see each other is very evident.

"I am *so* glad to see you," she is saying, with a happy little excitement, all her own. Neither of the men can remember ever having seen her this way before. Then De Thysbaert shakes hands in his lazy, indolent fashion.

"How are you, old man?"

"Céleste wrote me that you were not looking so well," Pierrepont is saying to Miss Langdon, "but I do not think that I ever saw you look better, or more beautiful." Then he asks for his wife.

"She has retired. Do not disturb her until morning," says Miss Langdon.

"Why, no, she has not; she is in one of the parlors," says Henri.

The woman gives him a glance. "She has gone to her rooms," she repeats. "Will you stay here," to Pierrepont, "until I bring Rose and Aunt May? No, do not come with me. I want them to be surprised, as I was. I will bring them to you."

Then she looks at De Thysbaert again, and somehow he understands that he is to keep Pierrepont there until she returns. Her heart

is beating with fear, as well as with indignation, as she hurries down the hall to the room where she knows Céleste and Rito are.

"He shall not be mortified," she is saying to herself, "nor subjected to a scene here. It will have to come sometime, but while I can save him unhappiness, I will."

She goes directly in, ignoring the ceremony of knocking, and walks straight up to them, indifferent to the fact that Céleste's head is on Rito's shoulder. Her face is pale, and her eyes flashing like hard steel.

"Your husband has come," she says, in a strained voice; "I have told him that you were in your room. Go to it. Let him find you there; and you," unveiled contempt in eye and voice, "you call yourself a *gentleman!*"

Céleste, when she does get to her room, and hastily puts on a negligée, is lost in query as to why Kate should have done her this good turn. She is so petty-souled herself that she does not understand why this woman, hating her as she knows she does, should not have connived at, rather than averted, a catastrophe; for, unsuspecting as Pierrepont was, Rito's presence and

attitude with her at that moment would have been hard to explain away.

Miss Langdon finds her aunt and sister, and returns with them. As Pierrepont watches the tall, graceful figure coming towards them, he feels suddenly, fiercely, all in a moment, that the love he has for this woman is *the* one love henceforth of his life.

When Pierrepont has gone in search of his wife, Miss Langdon leaves the others, and crosses the porch to where Rito stands alone.

"May I speak to you for a few moments?" she asks coldly.

"I am at your service, Mademoiselle," he replies.

"My cousin," she says slowly, "will wonder at your presence here. I wish you to make him believe that *I* am the attraction for you."

"Indeed?" he asks, "and, why, may I ask?"

"I do not care to see him humiliated before his friends," she answers.

"Oh, your love for him is even that strong, eh?" he suggests rudely.

"That is a lie," she says, with suppressed fierceness, "nor would you dare utter it to a

man. You are a coward!" scathingly. "No, I do not love him," excitedly, "but I love *honor*, a thing you know nothing about. If he find you here," with renewed excitement, "he must, he must see at last, and all his happiness, and his peace, will be gone. Have you no mother who would be proud of you, to do that which is right? Please, for the sake of your manhood, leave to-night. Do not let Pierrepont see you. If he know, if he think, even, he will kill you. There will be bloodshed, murder, and a noble life spoilt."

"You are a warm advocate, Miss Langdon," he says, "but strip your oratory of its ornamentation, and what does it amount to? You fear for your lover's happiness, and are willing to sacrifice much for that. I, too, am willing to pay something for my happiness. I shall not go."

"Then I hope that he kills you," she says.

She turns to join the others, takes a step forward, totters, and falls in a dead swoon.

"What did you say to her?" De Thysbaert demands fiercely of Rito, after they have taken the girl to her room.

"I? Ask the lady," he replies sneeringly.

"No, you shall tell me," says De Thysbaert, hotly, "or by the God above us, I shall make you."

"Not so much fervor, *mon Henri*," replies Rito; "she cares nothing for you, it is the other."

"You — liar!" and Henri de Thysbaert has struck Rito.

Miss Langdon is very wakeful to-night, and when Brooks creeps cautiously in, a letter in her hand, Kate says:

"What is it, Brooks? I am not asleep."

"A letter Mr. Henri gave me, Miss," says Brooks, wondering what the trouble may be.

"I will look at it now," replies Miss Langdon, and this was what she read:

"If possible, let me see you for a few moments. I leave for Paris to-night. Unless utterly impossible, do not refuse to see me. Henri de Thysbaert."

"I wonder what it can mean," thinks the girl to herself, and then she says aloud:

"Bring me my gown, Brooks, and say that I will see Monsieur de Thysbaert in ten minutes."

She goes into the private "reception," where in a very few moments Henri joins her. His face is pale, and he is probably more serious looking than she has ever seen him.

"You are very good to see me," he begins, "but I felt that I could not go without seeing you, as it," hesitatingly, "may be for the last time."

She sees by his agitated manner that there is something unusual the matter, and, with her woman's penetration, sees that it is sorely distressing him.

"What is it, my friend?" she asks kindly. Then he tells her, in a man's awkward way, that he has picked a quarrel with Rito, and that they are going to fight.

"But why — why is it?" she asks.

He tries to evade her questions.

"Was it about Céleste?" she asks again.

"No."

"What was it then? Was it about me?" with a sudden light in her eyes. "*I?*"

"Yes, my darling, it was you," he answers tremulously. "He dared, he dared —"

"What?" she asks, laying her hand on his arm.

"Listen, Kate," he says solemnly. "You, and it is only you who ever could have done it, have made me ashamed of myself, — my life, my principles. To me you are as sacred as my God, I love you better than my life itself. My whole faith is in you, and I would strangle as a dog the man who dared even speak your name without respect and veneration."

"You *both* will leave for Paris to-night," she says slowly. All her anger is gone. She even forgets that he is possibly going to meet death for her. She only thinks, "Pierrepont cannot, will not, see him."

"Yes, to-night," he says quietly, but he looks steadily at her. She flushes as she notices it, and then the tears rise to her eyes.

"You are so good to me, my friend!" she says, "but I am not worthy of this. Henri, it is the first time that any one has dared to speak of me, but do not mind, do not care. Oh, if you should die!" shudderingly, although *this* thought has only just come to her.

"Would you care?" he asks tenderly.

"Care? care? Oh, it would kill me," she replies.

"Kate!" he exclaims.

"No, no, don't misunderstand me," she says, "but don't go, don't go! You may die, *die!* I never thought of that," beseechingly.

"It is because I love you that I will go," he says firmly. "And now, see! no one knows what the morrow may bring. Before I go," hesitatingly, "will you bid me God-speed, and, Kate —" a long pause, — "kiss me once before I go. I may not die, but if I should, give me the memory of your kiss to take with me to eternity?" She trembles, hesitates. The tremulous eyelids quiver and quiver. With one great effort, she raises the tear-stained lashes. He never knows what that kiss cost her. Her face is raised to his, and he kisses it gently, reverently, as a father might kiss his child.

"Oh, take care of him, God, take care of him! Do not let *me* send him to his death," she prays.

Mrs. Langdon comes in to say a final good-night, and to see how Kate is, and conveys the information that "that nice Mr. Rito, Céleste's relation, had just made his adieus, having been

suddenly called to Paris, but hoped to return in a few days."

"Oh, Auntie!" suggests Miss Langdon, as Auntie prepares to leave, "it is just as well to say nothing of Monsieur Rito's presence to Joseph. He is jealous of even a look at Céleste."

"You don't mean it, my dear!" answers her aunt. "Well, I certainly should never have thought that of Joseph Pierrepont, especially of his wife's own relations;" but the dear old lady says nothing, and Pierrepont never hears it.

CHAPTER VII

THE following morning Céleste and her husband appeared at breakfast together, quite the model, affectionate married couple in demeanor. Céleste casts furtive glances at Miss Langdon, and as the hours pass, and neither De Thysbaert nor Rito are seen, she is lost in wonder at their absence. Pierrepont suggests a drive after breakfast, but Céleste manages to give some satisfactory excuse, and as the other ladies have gone to their rooms, nothing remains but for him to go alone. Mrs. Langdon, seeing him start from the window, suggests that the horses are vicious-looking brutes. In her kind, old-fashioned way, she sends down word to Pierrepont to ask whether the horses are safe? He answers in the affirmative, and Kate and Mrs. Langdon watch him drive off down the avenue.

"What ails you this morning, my dear? You seem so nervous," asks Mrs. Langdon of her niece.

"Oh, am I?" answers Miss Langdon, with a little start. "What time does the first train from Paris get here?"

"I do not know," said her aunt. "Why?"

"Nothing," she replies absently.

"What is it, Kate?" gently from the older woman. "Come, tell me, dear. It is so unlike you to be this way."

"Oh, nothing, really; digestion out of order, I fancy," says Miss Langdon, with an attempt at a smile.

But as her aunt watches her take her hat and go down the steps, she feels that there is something more powerful than indigestion that has wrought such a change in a temperament hitherto so placid and unexcitable. Miss Langdon goes down to the station alone, and waits for the in-coming train. Several people speak to her, but she hardly hears them. Her eyes, her heart, her prayers, are all for the puffing, spurting engine that comes thundering into the depot. A few mo-

ments of suspense, and she sees De Thysbaert, and she knows that remorse for his death now will not be hers. She advances towards him, the happy relief in her eyes unveiled.

"I have prayed for you," she almost breathes, rather than says. Then the tender face blanches again, "But you did not kill him?" she asks.

Henri is still looking at her. Every other fact seems minor to the consideration that she actually, she herself, has come down to meet him. It argues so well for him that he could cry out like a schoolboy. He looks at her so long, so happily, that she has to repeat her question.

"Oh, no, no," he says, "although I did try hard. He will have something to remember, however, probably for some little time to come. The bullet entered his thigh. Pshaw! such men as he you cannot kill!"

"Thank God!" she says fervently, "that you did not kill him, that you shamed him, but oh! did not kill him."

"Where is Kate, Mrs. Langdon?" asks Céleste, coming in a moment after Kate had gone.

"I do not know," answers Mrs. Langdon. "She went down the street a few moments ago."

"Ah!" an exclamation from Céleste, who is looking out of the window, "here she comes now, with Monsieur de Thysbaert."

"Oh, no," answers Mrs. Langdon, "he went to Paris in the same coach with Monsieur Rito last night."

"Rito?" says Céleste, "has Rito gone to Paris?" astonishment in voice and face.

"Surely you knew," says Mrs. Langdon, turning to look at her.

"Knew it! Oh, yes, yes, of course," says Céleste; and she hastily leaves the room, going to her own, and ringing for Thérèse.

"Where is Rito?" she asks, as soon as the woman appears.

"Ah, Madame is alone at last! I have so much to tell you," says Thérèse, breathlessly. "Monsieur Henri and Monsieur Rito quarrelled last night. I do not know, but I think it was about Mlle. Langdon. But both left for Paris last night. Gustave, Rito's valet, came with a note from Monsieur, but I — how

could I deliver it when Monsieur Pierrepont was ever with you? Well, they both went to Paris. Monsieur Henri, I see, has returned."

"And Rito? Heavens! Thérèse, have they fought?" cries Céleste. "Has he — has he —" excitedly, "has Henri killed him?"

"Ah, Madame, I fear so!" says Thérèse.

"A telegram for Madame Pierrepont," says a servant at the door.

With feverish haste she tears it open and reads:

"Have been wounded in a duel with De T——, not seriously. Have no fear. Come back to Paris as soon as you can. H. S. R."

"Curse her," she says fiercely. "Ah, *ma belle*, another little item that I have against you. Ah, you — not content with taking one lover, you must kill and send to death the other. *Curse you!*" She is so furious at the turn affairs have taken that she is blind to prudence, self-interest, everything, and resisting her woman's efforts, rushes downstairs into the parlors occupied by Miss Langdon, and confronts Mrs. Langdon, her niece, and Henri de Thysbaert. She looks at all three for a moment, and then,

with a face livid with rage, walks up close to Miss Langdon.

"Well, Mlle. Delilah," she says insolently, "how many more lovers do you intend to permit yourself? I gave you one, having finished with him, and because the other would not succumb to your charms, you would have him killed, eh?"

"Hush, woman!" says Henri, his face white, making an involuntary step forward. "You shall," sternly, "or I shall forget that you are a woman."

"Ah, yes, Sir Lancelot. *You* come to the rescue of injured innocence! Truly, the rôle becomes you well," she answers him, contemptuously.

Mrs. Langdon had not moved, but horror unspeakable was reflected from her face. Kate Langdon was as white as the roses in her dress. She speaks for the first time in the same even, calm voice:

"Aunt May, leave the room, please; yes, now. I will join you shortly."

Mrs. Langdon hesitates, but the stronger will wins, and she goes, her brain and innocent

heart in the turmoil of questioning excitement. Miss Langdon quietly closes and locks the door after her, Céleste meanwhile going on with her tirade.

"Hush, Céleste, for a few minutes," she says calmly; "I have put off this evil hour, but I see now that it is time to speak, and," firmly, "I shall speak. What you say of me, or to me, cannot harm me in the least. I admit that I have never liked you, but in no way have I allowed this feeling to make me ungenerous, or unjust in my conduct with you. When I came, at your solicitation, to your house, it was only with the kindest feelings towards you. When I did come, what did I see? — a wife honored and loved by the man she called husband, yet daily dishonoring and betraying this love, making him a fool and contemptuous in the eyes of all his friends, — aye, the laughing-stock of all his world. This was done to an honorable, noble, high-minded man, who could not do enough to insure the happiness of the woman whom he imagined was worthy of his love. He is of my blood, and very dear to us, and of course I felt it. Still it was not for me to help him to a

truer knowledge that would only destroy the faith of his life. As long as he did not know, I knew that he would be happy. He loves you so well. His faith is so great in you that should he recognize you as you are, — a bad, loveless, unprincipled woman," bravely, "it — well, it would kill him."

"Your love might console him," says Céleste, tauntingly.

It is only the additional quiver about the sensitive mouth which tells that Kate feels the insult, as she continues:

"Whatever efforts I have made, have been for his happiness. I do not hesitate to say it, for certainly if the actions of any man's life have been deserving of it, his have. I did speak to that man, whom you have the shameless taste to prefer to your husband, and he did insult me ungenerously, and was most unmanly. Monsieur de Thysbaert, without my knowledge, resented it, and wounded him."

"How nice to have such a brave defender, and I *know* that he makes a very good lover," says Céleste, coarsely.

"Whatever Monsieur de Thysbaert may

have been to you, Céleste, with me he has always been the gentleman," answers the girl, her face white.

De Thysbaert looks from one to the other, and wonders whether the same Maker made them both.

"Oh, no doubt," from Céleste, "but I doubt if Paris would swallow as much."

"Are you not ashamed, Céleste?" he says sternly.

This interruption of his seems to infuriate her.

"*Grand Dieu!* You — you!" she cries, "*you* taking the high moral strain? Listen, *ma belle* Kate, this paragon here, this same moral phenomenon, has thousands and thousands of times kissed my lips, and told me that Pierrepont was a fool, an empty-headed fool, with his high creeds and morals. Ha! ha! ha! What a convert for you! What a change, *mon Dieu*, what a change! A new Abélard! Héloïse, — I salute you. Listen, Kate Langdon, I, some day, shall be able to pay you. Until I do, the world will hold us both; but then one must suffer, and I think that Fate decrees that it shall be you."

"They only suffer who deserve suffering. Why do you quarrel with me, Céleste?" asks the girl. "Monsieur de Thysbaert," turning to him, "will you go now?"

He complies, but does not go far from the door.

"How obedient the lion has become!" says Céleste, sneeringly. "'*C'est encore nouvelle.*'"

"How weak, how petty!" thinks Kate, but only says, —

"Do you intend to repeat this scene with Joseph?"

Céleste looks up, and then smiles cunningly.

"Perhaps," she says, "since you are so anxious that he shall not know."

"I do not think that you will," coolly from Miss Langdon, "but," steadily, "as long as his knowledge of it, at the best, will only be a question of a little time, unless you outwardly show more respect to his honor, I shall tell him, *I*," imperturbably.

"More threats, bah! How much you do love him!" ejaculates Céleste.

"No," answers the girl, dispassionately.

"*Mais oui*," tauntingly from Céleste.

"You try me," says Kate, more weariness than anger in her voice. "What I want to say is this: As long as you are willing to keep his faith in you, I will help you, because of him, not you. For you I care nothing; but I do not —do not want open disgrace and unhappiness for him. You are wrong when you say that I love him. You probably cannot understand, nor will I try to explain my feelings towards him. He will be back shortly now. Go to him," a trifle bitterly, although she does not know it, "put your arms around him with a wifely caress, tell him how dear he is to you. Make him believe you are what he thinks you are. And, Céleste, when you are listening to other men's vows, think of him, of his greatness to their smallness, his nobility to their dishonor. Think how kind he has always been to you; how wholly he has trusted you; how much he has done for you, and how you have repaid him." Continuing, in a lower tone:

"Send Rito from you. Oh, how can you love him!"

"Enough!" interrupts Céleste. "I suppose that I *have* acted the fool this morning. I am

quite content, *ma belle*, that he should go on in the same blissful contentment. I came down here on the impulse and spur of the moment, probably due to a little too much Chartreuse. I am very well satisfied with my present banker," laughingly, "and, your *friend*," emphasizingly. "As far as I am concerned, he shall still have unbroken faith in his darling child-wife. But what a fool he is! *Au revoir*, Kate! But still, I say, we are not quite quits yet."

"What did she say?" asks Henri, returning after Céleste's departure.

"Oh, I do not know," answers the girl, "but if you will excuse me now, I will go to my room."

Henri de Thysbaert spends the next two hours in a chair on the porch, thinking of many things.

The horses that Pierrepont had driven out were not his own. They had not been out on the road for several days, as their restlessness and desire to go clearly expressed. It was just about as much as the man could do to manage them. After he had been out an hour or so, he unwisely relaxed his vigilance

and caution. The horses, shying at something, became at once unmanageable, and in a flash were tearing down the road, the carriage, a bright speck, now seen, now hidden. Pierrepont realized the danger, and setting his feet firmly against the dashboard, sawed the bits; but the combined strength of the two horses more than equalized the man's. On, on, they tore, their feet hardly touching the ground, the buggy swaying from right to left. Pierrepont felt himself growing momentarily weaker. The road was an unobstructed one. They might go on for hours this way; but would his strength last? He spoke to them, commanding them. All of no avail. On they rushed, a sudden lurch, a cry! and this is all he remembers.

De Thysbaert, sitting on the veranda, hearing a commotion of some kind, turns his head, and sees, tearing towards the stable, with something dragging in the rear, the two broken-winded, almost exhausted horses. The stable boys and crowd are scattering to right and left, while one, more fearless than the others, rushes out and stops the panting horses.

But what is this bruised and blood-stained heap? De Thysbaert starts to his feet, all color gone from his face. Some one from the house, behind, rushes past him down the steps. With one cry of agony she has reached the inanimate heap on the ground, staunching with her hair the blood flowing from his face and side, and calling out to God to save him! only to save him! Others gather around her. For the moment she has no strength, no consciousness, knowing nothing but that he may be dead. As she stoops over him, there is in her eyes the confessed passion and love that Dante saw in the eyes of Beatrice.

"Do not die!" she murmurs softly, and then for a few moments, as she kneels with his head in her arms, her proud lips pressed to his blood-stained face, she feels what it will be to her if his eyes never unclose, never seek hers again. He stirs a little, and as he does, a quiver shakes her from head to foot, in fear, in danger for him. Her head is bowed still lower.

"Live, live!" she implores.

Although sightless, and almost senseless, he

seems to hear her. He tries to rise, to put out his hands to her. He cannot see the divine eyes bending over him, nor the anguished tenderness, the *love* that lies in them. When they take him from her arms, it is with reluctant tenderness that she yields him to them. When the doctor told her that he would not die, the glory that shone one moment in that woman's face, once seen, was never forgotten.

She follows the *cortège* bearing him to the house, dazed, like one in a dream. The blood has dyed her white gown — *his* blood — and her hair is wet with it. Céleste was not at home at the time, and is told of the accident on her return, but is not allowed to see her husband. He lies maimed and bruised, in the darkened chamber above. The physicians are with him, and agree that he will not die, but that it may be weeks before he will regain consciousness. Mrs. Langdon has taken her niece to her room, and compelled her to go to bed, although to the beating, anxious heart rest will not come until — when? They finally leave her alone. She cannot see why they devote

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so much time to her, while he, perchance, lies dying. She goes up to the room at once, and sees the doctors. They tell her nothing new. Céleste is there at the door, very pale, very much frightened. The girl does not notice her at all, but calmly listens to the directions the doctors are giving. She suggests that they telegraph to Paris for a professional nurse, and makes two or three other sensible suggestions, of which the doctors mentally approve. They tell her, as she seems less excited than the rest of the women, to insure perfect quiet for the patient, and to allow as few as possible in the room. She remains in the sick-room with her aunt all that night, and all next day, when the nurse from Paris arrives, and relieves her. She has regained all her natural repose of manner. She sees De Thysbaert, and discusses the sad accident with him.

It is just fifty-four hours since she has been alone. No one, looking at her, would note any difference in her. The excitement of all was so great at the time of the accident, that even her words had not been heard, nor remembered. Even when she has gained her room, the maid

is there with some useless offer of assistance. She thanks the woman kindly, and dismisses her. Then she lies down on the bed, closing her eyes. Finally the maid leaves, repeating her offers in vain. The girl left lying there might be dead, so motionless she is. Part of the ray of the dying sun comes through her window, gently touching her hair with its golden ray. Through the space of many minutes she lies thus. A bird outside on the tree suddenly sends forth his little carol of praise. She hears him, and shudders as she does so. A glow of warmth passed over her, bringing back the color to her face. She starts towards the window. She must have air, and then she slowly turns until she has reached the mirror. The sweet face pales again.

"You," she says, scathingly, scornfully, as she meets her own eyes in the glass, "O God, great God, help me!" she moans, her self-abasement dealing her a keener blow than anything else could have done. She looks long and steadily at her face in the mirror, and her lips are pressed close without a sound, while her bosom heaves with its shamed, voiceless, sobs.

"O Father, forgive me!" the prayer breaks stifled, and full of misery from her very heart.

She knows that she loves him! When she had felt his heart beating against hers, when he lay stricken down in all his strength, it had come to her! She knew now that she loved him, loved him with a passion holding life worthless, if he were to be taken. All the passionate fire that had slept in her so long, had suddenly awakened to quick, delirious being. In the kisses she had pressed all unconsciously on the white, deathly face, lay the dawn of love; a knowledge that has brought an accusing agony in her eyes, bitterer to her than the scourge of death. She stands motionless and stern in her self-abasement.

"*You*," she says hoarsely, "you, who loved honor for honor's sake! Sin? There is no sin worse or greater than yours! You love him! Do you hear? *You love him!*" she says fiercely to herself. "Love him?" wonderingly, and then her voice sinking, "Ah, truest, noblest, I do love you, I do!" She starts with sudden horror and recoil. What is she saying? She turns once more to meet her own

eyes, and with a sudden, suppressed cry of agony, she gropes forward blindly, reels, staggers, and falls with her face downward.

On the morrow there is but little change in the patient. His state of unconsciousness may last for weeks, the doctors tell his wife, who with Miss Langdon and the nurse, are waiting to hear his opinion. Céleste is so nervous and discomposed that the doctor advises she should not remain in the room. In his condition, the patient may feel the effects of a commotion. Kate Langdon sits passively in the sick-room, assisting the nurse when she can. De Thysbaert comes in and chats noiselessly with her. Mrs. Langdon has been greatly exercised over her, but seeing her thus, goes away thoroughly satisfied. They speak in hushed whispers of the horrible possibility of what might have been. De Thysbaert tells her how bravely Pierrepont had held out against the horses, and does not fail to see the quick, convulsive shudder that passes over her, as she says gravely, —

"Yes, how grateful we should be that it was not death!"

The day draws to a close, and she wearily joins the others at dinner. Céleste is looking better, or perhaps it is the becomingness of the new gown that she wears for the first time this evening. Mrs. Langdon is not at dinner, and confides to her companion above stairs:

"No, my dear, I shall dine with you as much as possible hereafter, for the less I see of Joseph Pierrepont's wife, the better I shall be pleased;" and two days later suggests to her niece that they join Jack and Rose at Paris, the latter two having started a few hours before the accident.

"We can do nothing for Joseph," she says conclusively, "and really, Kate, after what occurred the other day, I am convinced that Céleste is no proper person to be with."

"We will wait a few days, Auntie," she had answered quietly.

But the few days lengthened into weeks. The patient was slowly but unquestionably improving. The doctors had banished all from the sick-room except the nurse, and some one to relieve her, Miss Langdon being selected as the least nervous one of the

women. Pierrepont lay as in a trance, with alternate periods of semi-consciousness. In his delirium, he would call her name, and although it would sometimes be Céleste, it was hers which was oftener on his lips. Once, when calling it, the nurse looked up, saying innocently, "He is thinking always of his wife," and rather wondered at the quick color suffusing the girl's face opposite. Below stairs she had heard of the "American lady's engagement to Monsieur de Thysbaert."

Sometimes Kate Langdon would be left alone and then it was that she found herself weakest. She would kneel beside him, bathing the fevered face, or adjusting his pillow; and even though he lay senseless, her touch seemed to have power upon him, and the fitful, restless breathing seemed to be quieter. As he lay there, motionless, strengthless, he seemed all her own. Oh, could he but have seen the passionate, remorseful love in the eyes looking into his! Could he but have heard the quick, half-suppressed exclamations that burst from her tortured, loving heart! Yet, as she knelt there in silence, she knew, by some merciful

intuition, that this was not death that had come. She looked long and silently at him, confessing with her eyes the fulness of her love. Loved him, oh, God, *how* she loved him! she, who had laughed to scorn the love of other women's lives, and had held in disdain its very name! "A love dishonored," her accusing heart tells her. Then, with a little stifled cry, she bends lower. "I do not care! I do not care!" she cries hotly, and her soft cheek lies against his unconscious one, while his head lies on her breast. For the moment she feels nothing but the ecstasy of a woman's love, until now unknown. Then, suddenly, with the latent shame, she draws herself gently from him, and sinks at his feet, humiliated, remorseful, penitent, and hating herself.

There comes a day when Pierrepont is himself for two hours in succession. He was alone with the nurse the first time that he returned to consciousness, and she, using her experience rather than the physician's advice, as soon as she saw reason and comprehension had returned, told him quietly, without exciting him, the incidents of his sickness.

Day by day, now, he improved. Miss Langdon tells the doctors that she has admitted his wife, as naturally he will wish to see her first. No objection being made to this, it so happens that on the third occasion of his regaining consciousness, he is alone with Céleste. He recognizes her, and smiles, but is too weak to say anything. She bends over and kisses him, and he makes a faint movement of return with his lips. Miss Langdon only watches now when he is asleep and the woman is taking her necessary rest. As usual to-night, she sits reading, now and then glancing at the clock to see the hour for giving the next potion. They have just administered an opiate, hence his sleep will be unbroken until morning, — at least so they told her, and so she believes, until there is a slight movement made. She looks towards him, and meets his eyes looking at her, and in them, reason. He gives her no time to speak, saying (they are the first words that he has uttered since his illness), —

"It is you, Kate?"

His words are low and indistinct, but she rises at their sound, trembling violently. It

seems to her as though he, too, must hear the beatings of her heart, as she answers in a voice trembling with emotion, —

"Yes, but you must not talk."

She tells herself that she *must not* show the excitement that she is under. It is weak! It is wrong! She has come nearer his couch, and in the eyes raised to hers she sees a something which sends the blood in one mad, tempestuous whirl through her whole body. But, as she takes his hand in hers, it is in a calm voice that she is saying:

"We are all so happy now that you are recovering, but you must not attempt to talk, or it will undo all the good that has been accomplished. Now lie back on the pillow."

He obeys her, but his eyes are yet fixed on her face as he motions her to sit down beside him. She does as he wishes, arranging his pillow at the same time.

"How long has it been, Kate?" he asks, looking at her.

"Six long weeks," she answers quietly.

"I have been dangerously ill, then?" he says.

"But you are almost well now," she answers evasively.

"Who has been with me?" he asks.

"Your wife, and of course the nurse," she answers.

"And you?" he asks, rising on his arm, and seeking her eyes with his; "have you not been here every day?"

"I came when I could," she answers calmly; "but it was your wife who was with you most."

He looks at her keenly, and then seems suddenly tired, sinking down again on his pillow, and mechanically taking the potion that she offers. He lies with his eyes open for some time, but says nothing more; and the drug soon taking effect, he falls off into an easy sleep.

She rises and looks at him once more, with a world of passion and love in her usually serene, fathomless eyes. Her face pales as she murmurs:

"After to-night, oh, my love, I must not even think of you! God help me, God help me!"

While the nurse the following morning is attending to her patient's many increasing little

wants, she is not a little surprised to hear him say:

"Nurse, I fear that this confinement will tell on Miss Langdon. She has been so constantly in the room," — for a sick man not a bad piece of strategy.

"Yes, sir," answers the nurse, garrulous enough now that it will not injure him to have her talk; "that 's what I have been telling her all along, but, oh, dear sir, what could you do, when she would look with those big eyes of hers at you, and say, 'I prefer to be here'? Then dear Madame was so nervous. I am sure, sir, that I have every cause to be thankful to the young lady. I don't know what I should have done without her."

Then he asks whether his wife had been often.

"Yes, sir, oh, yes, sir," answers the woman; "but Madame was so nervous that the doctor said it was best she should not be in the sick-room much. But Madame always sent to inquire; oh, yes, every morning Madame sent."

"But you and Miss Langdon have really had the care of me?" he asks.

"Yes, sir;" and with a view to cheering him still more, adds, "and they do say, sir, Monsieur de Thysbaert, the *fiancé*, is very jealous of the hours that Mademoiselle spends away from him."

"What!" he asks sharply.

"Monsieur de Thysbaert," says the nurse, explanatorily.

"They are not engaged," he says, with unnecessary abruptness.

"They do say so, sir," she replies.

"Well, then they lie; that's all!" he says irritably.

"You had better take some of this, sir," she suggests.

"Oh, confound the stuff! I don't need it," he says impatiently; and the nurse tells her *confrères* that noon that Monsieur is so much better, "he really had just sworn."

De Thysbaert and Miss Langdon come in from their walk, and go at once to the sick-room, Miss Langdon omitting to take off her wrap until she is in the sick-room, when Henri proceeds to take it off for her. Pierrepont is watching them intently from his couch

at the window, although they are unconscious of it. He cannot see the woman's face, but the man's is full of unmistakable love. In Pierrepont's feverish, sick, and unnatural condition, the fact irritates him not a little; and De Thysbaert's "Well, old man! how are you, to-day?" does not receive the usual cordial response. He, on the contrary, turns to Miss Langdon, saying:

"You look as though you had enjoyed your walk."

"I did, very much!" she answers brightly, and then noticing that he is alone, and knowing that this is contrary to the doctor's orders, she asks, "Where is Céleste?"

"I am sure I can't say," he answers wearily; "she was here but a few minutes, and then Thérèse called her, and she has not returned."

"She has no right —" she begins indignantly, and then calmly, "I dare say that she will be back at once; I will wait."

"I am afraid," he says, in a tone peculiar and foreign to him when speaking of his wife, "that Céleste found our *tête-à-tête* rather uninteresting."

She notices his face is a little flushed, and it is perfectly natural for her to come over as she does, and lay her cool, slender fingers on his hot forehead.

"You have more fever," she says gravely; "I hope that you have not been talking."

"No, but you were so long coming," he says half petulantly.

Henri looks upon this speech as nothing less than brutish selfishness, and, moreover, jealously resents this great solicitude on her part.

"Would you like me to read to you?" she asks soothingly, evidently having forgotten De Thysbaert's presence.

Pierrepont puts out his hands to her with a gesture of content, which fills De Thysbaert with an insane desire to kick him on the spot, ill as he is. The sympathy that he had felt for Pierrepont is rapidly undergoing transformation into a very different feeling. However, he does manage to say, "And may I listen too?"

"Of course," she says, pointing to the chair beside her." What power a few words from a woman's lips sometimes has!

Céleste finds all three on her return. She is

laboring under some excitement, as Miss Langdon sees at once. "What is the matter with her?" she whispers hurriedly to De Thysbaert; "find out for me if you can," and he goes out to do her bidding.

"You are back, Céleste?" her husband says quietly. "What did Thérèse want?"

"Oh," she replies, "I — she — she wanted to see me about a gown."

"I hope that it was satisfactory," he says. Miss Langdon is surprised. This is the first time that she has ever heard anything like veiled sarcasm coming from his lips to her. Céleste evidently sees no *arrière-pensée* in it, as she answers more composedly:

"Oh, yes, nothing very seriously wrong about it." Then says irrelevantly:

"Joseph, mother is in Paris. I should like to run up for a few days."

"I wish you could, my darling," he answers, "and that I could go with you. I realize what this enforced delay must be to you."

"But I was thinking," said Céleste, "now that you are so much better, that I — I might go — go alone?"

"Oh!"

If a knife had pierced him, he could not have felt greater pain. While he had believed himself unworthy of her love, still in her his faith had been a perfect one. She was still to him the personification of unselfish devotion and perfection.

"You cannot go alone, I do not think," he says, after a pause, while he looks at her, and a change of expression comes over his face.

"Come here, my wife," he says softly, "and tell me how glad you are that I am able once more to hear you tell me how much you love me."

Céleste is nothing if not an actress, and she proceeds to do this little bit of stage business very prettily. Poor Pierrepont! His noble, reckless belief in her had alike the sublimity and the blindness of every chivalrous idealism. What an awakening there might be!

Céleste, however, for reasons of her own, intended returning to Paris the following day, and did not hesitate in a few minutes to broach the subject again. She was not quite herself, or probably she would have worded her request a

little differently. She advances several reasons why she would go, all palpably demonstrating the selfishness of her proposition. Kate rather wonders at the absence of her usual tact. Her husband hears her in silence to the end. He seems strangely moved, his face grows very pale.

"It is my wish that you remain here, Céleste, until I am able to accompany you. We will say nothing more about it," he says quietly.

De Thysbaert, coming in, whispers to Miss Langdon the startling information, "That cur Rito is here."

"What is it, Kate?" asks Pierrepont, quick to notice the change in her expression; "what is De Thysbaert trying to scare you with?"

"Yes, what is it?" says Céleste, in a dry, hard voice. Then she gives vent to a little spiteful laugh, feeling confident of no disclosure, although she surmises at once that Henri has heard of Rito's arrival. The eyes of the two women met, one scornful and the other defiant, and then one face changes, as the owner of it says, with a little laugh, which is not very gay:

"I question the propriety of so much curiosity, and I certainly shall not satisfy either of you."

She then leaves husband and wife together, and goes below with Henri, where she passes Rito in the hall, and purposely omits recognition.

"Céleste," Pierrepont is saying, "how infinitely long it has been since I have had my sweet wife with me!"

"You have been so very, very ill, my poor Joseph!" she says, coming over and caressing him; while she wonders how long it will be before the nurse will come to relieve her.

"You are wonderfully beautiful!" he says, looking at her admiringly.

"Thank you, *mon ami*," she laughs.

"Céleste," he says musingly, "I want to ask you something, and I want you to tell me truthfully." He is speaking so seriously that she looks up half in vague alarm.

"What is it?" she says curiously.

"This," he answers; "can you truthfully say that you love me as much now as you did the day you were married?"

She does not laugh out as she very well could, and does not speak untruthfully when she says fervently:

"Fully as much. How can you ask such a question?"

He flushes, although he may not know why, and then says, with a depth and profundity of feeling that she will never understand, —

"And may God make me worthy of your love!"

Heaven only knows what prompts her to make her next speech, possibly merely to say something.

"*Et toi, mon bon Joseph!* how is it with you? Has there no one come to swerve you from your allegiance?"

Laughingly as she says it, it seems to him a direct accusation of his mental treachery and inconstancy to her.

"Céleste!" he says with deep feeling.

She laughs gleefully, saying, "Remember, '*En l'amour il n'y a que les commencements qui sont charmants.*' Some one has said that marriage, to be perfect, must first overcome seven worlds of difficulties, and ours — "

"And ours, my wife?" he asks.

"—had no difficulties," she says.

"No," he answers, "but a strong foundation of love, honor, and truth."

"What a prig he is!" she is thinking.

"How unworthy I am of her!" he is thinking.

"Suppose, Joseph," she asks suddenly, "you were in the position of Monsieur Duval, with whose divorce proceedings the papers are so full at present. What do you think he ought to do?"

"Céleste, I would not read such stuff," answers her husband.

"But every one is talking about it," she says; "and tell me, I want to know what you think about it."

"My darling," he says gravely, "if I were that man, he who had robbed me not only of my wife, but honor as well, should not live an hour."

"But," she argues tranquilly, "what good would that do? It would only be adding crime to crime, wrong to wrong."

"Still, I should kill him," he says feelingly.

"Ah, no!" she says again with a smile.

The nurse entering at this moment, further discussion is stopped.

"You have been talking too much, Monsieur, entirely too much," says the nurse, disapprovingly.

Miss Langdon and Henri de Thysbaert have gone out for another walk. They are pacing up and down the sands. Mrs. Langdon has almost overcome her prejudice, although she would be loath ever to accept him as a nephew.

"Well, more annoyance for you," De Thysbaert is saying.

"Yes," answers the girl, sadly; "and the doctors say that he must particularly avoid all excitement and worry."

"You think, then, that the knowledge of her infidelity would worry him?" asks De Thysbaert. There is something in his tone which irritates her extremely. She turns towards him coldly.

"He is an honorable man, and he loves her," she says.

"I am not so sure," he replies.

"What nonsense!" she answers; "in fact, she

is the only woman he will ever love. Some natures are that way."

"His is not," says De Thysbaert.

"How little you know!" she says half regretfully.

"May I tell you what I think?" he asks.

"Yes," she answers in a low tone.

"Well," says De Thysbaert, "I think that he is very much in love with another woman. In fact, I am quite sure."

She is considerably worried, but must laugh at this.

"Who is the invisible, pray?" she asks, smiling; and she seems so thoroughly unconscious to whom he is alluding, that all the painful fears which have been torturing him for weeks are suddenly dispelled. Whatever may be Pierrepont's feelings towards her, hers for him are only those of a cousin.

"I will not tell you her name," he says cheerfully, "but rest assured her existence is no figment of my brain."

She laughs at him in derision and then falls to discussing the unprecedented assurance of Rito appearing on the scene.

The days go on. Pierrepont has been out once, and is daily nearer recovery. Rito phlegmatically accepts the rather universal snubbing along with Céleste's open acceptance of his attentions. He and De Thysbaert meet as strangers. Céleste, once passing the latter with Miss Langdon, calls out, in an aside, in sheer maliciousness:

"*Ah, ma Sainte Vièrge! Les roses de la vie ne sont pas à toi, eh?*"

Pierrepont is as yet in ignorance of Rito's presence. Once making his way to his wife's *boudoir* to surprise her pleasantly, he meets some one in the hall coming out of her bedroom; but the shadows are so thick that he cannot see. On inquiry Céleste tells him that it was a waiter.

One evening, when Mrs. Langdon and her niece have gone to their rooms, and De Thysbaert is smoking his cigar outside, the nurse knocks at Miss Langdon's door with "a request from Monsieur Pierrepont, that if Miss Langdon were not otherwise occupied, the patient would like her to come to the sick-room."

"Where is his wife?" asks Mrs. Langdon, with a little show of annoyance.

"I will come at once, tell him," Kate answers.

"You sent for me," she is saying a few minutes later.

"And you were very kind to come," he answers.

"What can I do for you?" she asks kindly.

"Indulge a sick man's vagaries," he replies; "I have been reading such an odd little German treatise on divorce, and being in a talkative mood, sent for you to discuss it with me."

She laughs a little, saying, "It is a subject in which I am not much enlightened, and upon which I am certainly unable to argue!"

"But tell me what you think of it," he persists.

Still another little laugh greets his question as she says, half reluctantly and a trifle more seriously:

"I think very little of it indeed! If anything would reconcile me to Catholicism, it is their belief in regard to this."

He is looking at her steadily, as she is speaking, saying quietly, when she has finished;

"Let me tell you this story that I have been reading to-night. It was so unusual that it leaves an impression. The man, the hero, believing that he loved the woman, married her, and learned too late that the happiness of his life lay yet in another's keeping."

"What a weak creature!" she says quietly.

"You think so?" he asks quietly.

"Certainly," she laughs, "unless he were a boy, and incapable of discriminating—"

"On the contrary," he interrupts, "he was a man, and the woman to whom he was married, was faultless."

"What a craven hero!" she says. "I am afraid that he was not worthy of the woman."

"No," he says feelingly, "he was not. Yet, do you remember, he who was so great in his poems and truth hath said, 'Love is not to be commanded'?"

"Molière has much to answer for," she answers laughingly; "but I am afraid that your book possesses rather an unhealthy tone."

"Perhaps; but have you no pity for the man?" he asks.

"Pity!" she says. "No; rather contempt, I should say. Did he divorce from the woman?" she asks merrily.

"No," he says briefly, adding, "I tell the story poorly."

"Very," she supplements teasingly, "and I am quite surprised at your advocacy of the man."

"Yes, I suppose so," he says wearily.

"Do not make his griefs your own," she laughs; "I told you that my knowledge was scant on the subject. To change it, how are you feeling to-night?"

"Much better, thank you," he replies.

Notwithstanding her perfect outward control of self, she feels as all women feel when near the man they love.

"How restless you are!" he says a trifle petulantly, as she moves noiselessly around the room, adjusting this thing and that. "Are you not going to sit down?" he asks.

"I think not," she answers, with an effort. She hardly dares speak, lest he shall hear the love quivering in her voice. She hardly dares look, lest he shall see the love in her eyes.

"Good-night," she says gently, stooping over his bed and looking down only once. He stretches out his hand with sudden impulse, detaining her by her dress.

"Kate, tell me," he says with sudden command, "tell me, swear to me, that you have never loved!"

She looks at him in fearful alarm, and as she sees what is in his face, in spite of her very self, comes the desolate, miserable cry of a woman's broken heart.

"Tell me," he says, hoarsely, seizing her by the wrist, "and, as you believe in your God, tell me the *truth*."

In an instant there flashes through her what she *must* do. Her heart, in one soft, throbbing moment of ecstasy, is telling her that he, too, possibly loves her. In that short, fleeting instant, this is all that she is conscious of. Then lifting her head defiantly, she looks him fully in the eyes, calmly, unflinchingly, although the blood has left her face.

"I do not admit your right to ask," she is saying, "but I will answer now, as I have never been able to answer before, — I do love

some one, better, aye, God knows, better than my life!"

"Swear it," he says. The words came so low that she scarce heard them.

"I swear it," she says solemnly.

"De Thysbaert?" he asks.

"No," she says.

"Whom?" he asks, tightening his hold on her wrist. With one mighty effort she tells her lie.

"There, over there —" she is saying, but her voice has lost its calm — "in America, and I — I — only realized it a little while ago." He gives a short, sharp sigh as he releases her, saying:

"I hope that you will be happy, child! and do not think me mad. I feared that it might have been De Thysbaert, and we all love you too well for that. Tell me," with a little laugh not his own, "what manner of man is this to whom we are to give you?"

"I love him!" she answers simply, thinking of him, looking at him, even as she speaks. He only sees the love light in her eyes, and an exceeding bitterness fills his heart, while

his conscience tells him that it is only meet and right such suffering should be his.

"It is so strange, Kate, to hear you say that you love any one," he says.

"I worship him," she says softly. Poor thing! Even to give utterance to her love is a relief to her, although some inner instinct may tell her that her words are causing him pain.

"Kate," he says, in surprise at her words.

"Well," she answers coldly, "did you not ask me?"

"Yes," he assents, his eyes unfairly remaining on her flushed face.

"I must go now," she says a little nervously.

"Pardon me," he says; "I forgot I was detaining you. Do you know whether Céleste has retired? I think that I will give her a little surprise."

"No, you must not," she said. She had reached the door, but turned back excitedly at his words. "You must not. She has gone to bed. She has a headache. Surely," anxiously, "you would not disturb her."

"You are very thoughtful for her," he says; in truth, a little amazed at her earnestness.

"Yes," she says convincingly, "she has not been feeling well to-day."

"I think that I will go and see her, at any rate," he persists.

"No," she objects, and comes back, putting her hand on his shoulder as she does so.

"Promise me," she says, "that you will not disturb her to-night. What is the use of annoying her?" With feigned calmness, "You know how very nervous she is."

He looks at her; she seems so strangely unlike herself.

"Certainly, if you think best not," he answers good-naturedly, but after she has left him, he needs must think over this strange mood of hers, as well as the startling revelation that she, *she* has loved all this while.

Upstairs Rito and Cèleste are in Madame's private apartments. This fact Kate knows. After she has Pierrepont's promise not to go to his wife's rooms to-night, she goes to her own room, her heart filled with conflicting emotions, — ecstasy and despair struggling for supremacy. He, whom she has just left, has only the despair to baffle with, and an ever

accusing conscience demanding, "Wherein has this woman, whom you call wife, failed?" An impulse moves him to go to his wife, and tell her, not all, but much of the misery that is consuming him. So strong does this idea take possession of him, that he forgets the promise that he has made to Kate. With an excitement he hardly understands, he hurriedly rises, dresses himself, and starts towards Céleste's apartments. Notwithstanding the fact that Kate has never known him to break a promise, to-night she watches in trepidation fully a half-hour to see him come out and pass on to his wife's rooms. That her fears are not groundless is soon proved. The instant that she sees him, the blood rushes to her face, and with a little suppressed cry she rushes up the back stairs, bursting unceremoniously into Céleste's apartments, who is calmly smoking her cigarette in her *negligée*, Rito sitting *chez lui* opposite.

"Go into the other room, quick!" she says excitedly, and, pushing Céleste violently into the other room, rushes back to the astonished Rito, saying, while her eyes are like livid coals,

"Put your arms around me! quickly, quickly! He is coming!" "*Volontiers, ma belle!*" Rito says insultingly, and brutally taking advantage of her words. It is only a second, a hundredth part of a second, and then Joseph Pierrepont opens the door, and meets them, face to face, thus. In that second his faith in his very God is shaken. He looks first at the one, then at the other. There is a hellish smile playing in Rito's face. He now understands, and thrice-cursed cur that he is, is content that it should be thus. With stern horror and loathing the man looks on the woman whom he had believed to be God's highest type.

"*You!*" he says, his voice vibrating with contempt and scorn; "O God!" heart-brokenly "*you!*" and without another word he turns and leaves them.

Rito has quite a time, with Céleste's assistance, to bring Miss Langdon back to consciousness. When she does finally open her eyes, she looks another woman, ages older. She calmly looks at them both, rising with difficulty to her feet, then in an unusually calm voice says:

"I never yet have wished any one ill, but I do pray God that you both may suffer the misery that I have gone through to-night."

Towards morning, the doctor is sent for post-haste. Miss Langdon was found in a swoon in her room, and all efforts to rouse her from her lethargy have been in vain. Later, she became delirious with fever. The doctors inquire whether she has had any great, sudden, mental shock that would cause this prostration. Céleste makes herself prettily officious in useless attentions to the white, unconscious girl on the bed. It is only a few days, however, when Miss Langdon reappears among them, quite herself once more. Both she and her aunt now talk of an earlier departure than they at first intended. Céleste deplores this to her husband, but is not met with the usual sympathy. She and Rito look upon the girl's sacrifice as a huge joke, rather grateful for it in a way, but still they think her a great fool. They have become a little more discreet of late, since Pierrepont's convalescence.

In a few days Mrs. Langdon and her niece will sail for America. Since her slight illness,

Miss Langdon has rather kept to herself, with De Thysbaert in devoted attendance. So considerate and kind, and withal so manly, has he proved himself of late, that his friendship is becoming a thing very dear to her. With Joseph Pierrepont she had not exchanged a word, the hotel life making this possible; but she is conscious of his never-flagging scrutiny. Rito still stays, and publicly attempts to transfer many of his attentions to Miss Langdon, thereby confirming Pierrepont's worst suspicions. With some inaudible tact on both their parts, no one knows of the rupture of friendship between Miss Langdon and Pierrepont.

Kate is sitting on the porch that faces on the garden from her room late one evening, just as the moon is coming up beyond the hills. De Thysbaert, who had been with her, has gone. The moon's rays falling on her, show her very beautiful and sad. She is so lost in reverie, that she fails to notice a dark figure steal cautiously by her, and go on to the shadows beyond. Minutes, probably ten, elapse, when she is startled by a voice, Pierrepont's

voice, — but, *can it be his?* — asking, "Is that you, Kate?"

She starts. "Why, what is the matter?" she cries involuntarily, as, turning, she sees his pale, haggard, ghastly face. "What is it?" she says fearfully.

"Oh, what is it?" "Oh, nothing, nothing at all!" he answers, with a bitterness that she has never heard. "Have I startled you?" his voice still husky, and adding abruptly, "Have you seen my wife? Is she in her rooms?"

Without a moment's hesitancy, without a flinching from the eyes, so sternly meeting hers, she answers, "Yes, she and Aunt May have just left me."

"You are sure?" he asks. How strange his voice sounds!

"Yes," she says coldly, without a tremor in her voice.

"Very well," he replies, in the same strained voice. "I shall not seek her then."

Some minutes before he had spoken to Miss Langdon, he had gone to his wife's apartments for some papers that he had left there, and

would want in the morning. Fearing that she was sleeping he knocked softly in order not to awaken her. Receiving no answer he gently tried the door. It was locked. He called softly, "Céleste;" then he thought what a pity it was to disturb her; yet he knew that he should need the papers in the morning before she should have arisen. Again he calls softly, "Céleste."

"*C'est toi, mon Rito?*" asks his wife's low musical voice. Surely he is mad. What phantom of his brain is this?

"Tell me, is it you, Rito?" repeats the same low voice.

He strives to answer her, but he is stifling. He sways like a man drunken with wine, and turning from the door confronts — Rito. He takes a step or two forward, his chest heaving, his face ashen and so horrible that it has lost all human semblance. No sound for a moment escapes him; then turning to Rito he says, with a dead, unnatural calmness:

"I am going to kill you both. Tell the woman."

Then he goes to his rooms and gets his fire-

arms, and in a deliberate, cool manner, sees that they are loaded, and starts back to his wife's apartments.

Thérèse, always on the alert and suspicious, goes to one of the rear doors of the apartment, calling frantically in a low voice to her mistress to admit her, and when Céleste opens the door she springs forward towards her crying:

"*Mon Dieu! Ton mari, ton mari!*"

Céleste, opening those beautiful sleepy eyes of hers, sees her husband standing with his pistol in his hand.

"I am going to kill you both," he repeats quietly.

Thérèse, crouching down near her mistress, is watching him. She knows that he will do as he says. With a panther-like bound she suddenly springs upon him, knocking the weapon out of his hand through the window. He tries to throw her from him, but she holds on with fiendish intensity, bidding her mistress and Rito all the while to be gone.

Céleste, more dead with fear than alive, looks from one man to the other.

"Go, go," Thérèse is crying excitedly; "he

will kill you both, he will, he will." Her strong Alsatian arms hold the man, who has been weakened by his illness, as in a strong vise.

"Joseph! Joseph!" pleads his wife, putting her hand out to him. He shudders as he hears her. Great beads of perspiration stand out on his forehead, and his veins are like knotted cords.

"Prepare yourself!" he is saying to Rito; "I will fight you, although I should kill you and her without mercy."

"To-morrow?" suggests Rito, now calm.

"Now!" answers Pierrepont.

"*Eh bien!*" says Rito, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Select what arms Pierrepont will, Rito knows that it will be hard to find his match in any. Thérèse, now that the pistol is safely gone, releases her hold. That would be another thing if it were going to be a duel, she thinks.

Pierrepont, without a movement of haste, goes out, locking the door and possessing himself of both keys. He goes to De Thysbaert's rooms, accepts a cigar, and after he has lighted it, tells him why he has come, all with this

horrible, unnatural calmness. They hunt up another man, and return to Céleste's rooms. She is at the door when her husband unlocks it. He passes her without noticing her, and, turning, says something inaudible to De Thysbaert, giving him two letters. Hardly a word is spoken. They all withdraw silently from the room. Rito holds out his hand to Céleste, but she dares not take it. Without a moment's delay, as soon as Pierrepont has opened the door, Thérèse steals out, and hurries to Miss Langdon's room, who by this time had retired.

"Who is there?" she calls, as the girl knocks.

"I, Mademoiselle, Thérèse. Open, for the love of God!"

Kate quickly opens her door, and by the girl's face sees at once that something is amiss.

"Oh!" cries Thérèse, "Monsieur and Monsieur Rito! Oh! they are going to fight! Monsieur has discovered Madame! Oh! the Holy Virgin protect her!"

Her words and manners are so incoherent that it is some seconds before Kate realizes

what she means. As she does, she snatches up her dressing-gown, and followed by the girl, speeds quickly down the steps back into the outer lawn. The moon is now at its height. She sees the four men, sees Rito, with that hellish smile of bravado on his face, and Pierrepont stern and white.

"Monsieur Rito will kill him! *kill* him!" says Thérèse, with a smile as fiendishly exultant as Rito's own.

But all that the woman crouching down there hears, all that she knows, is that *his* life, the life that she would willingly give her own for, is in jeopardy. Her almost pulseless heart tells her that it is just that Rito should meet death at his hands. His life, alas, would be small payment for his great sin. She knows that it is Pierrepont's first shot.

"O God," she prays, "steady his hand, steady his hand!"

Not for an instant does she doubt that her Maker will grant her prayer. A single shot rings out on the stillness of the night.

"Oh, God, he has failed!" she cries.

With a convulsive leap, and a smile on her

face, she springs directly in front of Pierrepont, intercepting the fatal bullet, as it comes whizzing, whirring, striking the firm, white breast of the woman, as she staggers, still smiling, towards the man to whom she has given her love, her life! With a great unearthly cry of agony, he catches her up in his arms, her life-blood wetting his cheek. All is dark and sickly to his senses. O God, in thy mercy comfort him now! The others rush towards them, De Thysbaert's face awful with horror. Even he, who has done this, turns sick as he looks on his work. They have lain her gently on the ground, while Pierrepont kneels beside her, calling upon God in a man's wild, fierce agony to spare her. And although she can no longer see, and her brain is becoming dizzy, she puts out her hands feebly to where she thinks that he is.

"Ah, now you know!" she murmurs, "it was you —*you* — always!"

He bends lower, lower, reverently over her with unutterable grief and love in his face. She has given her life for him! A quiver shakes him from head to foot. Her beautiful,

pure, unspotted life for his! He sways downward to her feet like a dying man, and life's joys from that moment are forever dead to him.

They carry her into her room, and lay her on her bed. Life is still there, but they all, who look upon her, must needs know that this beautiful thing will soon be an inanimate piece of clay, and the soul gone hence, where there is the sweetness of peace, and the oblivion of earthly passion. He, for whom she had renounced her young life, bids the others leave them together. She has regained consciousness, but her life-blood is ebbing fast. She looks up at him with the same smile which he had seen upon her face the night that she had plead with him not to go to his wife's room. With his head sunk, he looks down in her eyes with a look so longing, so worshipful, that, far gone as she is, she knows the love that is hers, and counts her death little if life has once made sure this knowledge. She puts out her arms to him in utter abandon. She knows that she is going to die, and she knows that he loves her.

"Do not grieve," she says wistfully.

Then for a space, as though the words had been an effort, she lay quietly with her head against his heart, her eyes alone answering the love and passion in his.

"My darling!" he moans, "oh, live! O Almighty God, spare me this life!"

"Are you there?" she asks dreamily, a moment later, and without waiting for him to answer, says pitifully:

"I tried not to love you, but — oh, my beloved! I could not — I could not help — When I," faintly, "am dead, always remember that — I tried — but — I could not!"

"Oh, my darling!" he moans.

"It was you," she says brokenly, "I — I — loved, when I — told you — I — I —"

"My beloved! my beloved!" he cries, in his agony.

"I am dying, dying," she calls out suddenly, fearfully. She strives to rise. The loss of blood is too great, and she falls back exhausted in his arms.

"Kiss me, kiss me before I die!" she rather breathes than says. Then, with the smile again on her face, her lips meet his in one

breathless caress, as the soul passes on into eternity.

They find them together with his arms around her, and she, in all her splendid grace and sovereign womanhood — dead. His friends try to arouse him, and when they turn to speak to him, see God's mercy, for all reason has forever fled!

CHAPTER VIII

IT is a year after the sad tragedy at Trouville. Madame Rito, the *ci-devant* Madame Pierrepont, with a few particular friends, is having her afternoon high tea. The company, about twenty in all, seems quite interested in what their hostess is telling them.

"Henri, of all others," she is saying, laughing musically; "who could have imagined him capable of such a thing? Only fancy, *marrying* the woman, and acknowledging the boy as his! Who can, after this, ever say that the days of Quixotism are over?"

"But who was she?" some one asks.

"That is the remarkable part of it," she answers laughingly. "None other than one of his former discarded mistresses, and Henri has actually, yes, actually been fool enough to *marry* the woman. That is what amuses me so. He, I believe, has gone to Africa, or

India, or somewhere, but Mademoiselle, nevertheless, is mistress of all those vast possessions, and the boy will heir them."

Amidst much laughter and pleasant words, guest after guest depart.

"What a magnificent type of woman Madame Rito is!" said one gentleman, a stranger in Paris, to another, as they go down the steps of Madame's house.

"Yes, and as devilishly unprincipled as beautiful," answers the other, feelingly. "You know that that poor fellow, whose story she was jesting and laughing over, was at one time her lover, and about as low as she makes them all. Well, then there came another woman, as beautiful as she, but with a noble, majestic soul. De Thysbaert fell in love with her. It was Kate Langdon. You know the story. Well, after her death, poor De Thysbaert was nigh mad in his distraction. If ever a man loved a woman he loved her; and, poor devil! did the only thing that he knew would please her. He married a girl whom he had ruined, a good woman, they say, and acknowledged her child as his. It seems that Miss Langdon

had taken care of the girl, and became greatly attached to her; all of which De Thysbaert learned afterward. At any rate he married the woman. The journals here have all gotten hold of it, and are making no end of a row over it. De Thysbaert *was* such a devil, you know, and all that sort of thing, that this news has been like a bombshell in this world. Verily, it is true, Woman *is* the source of all evil, or all good!"

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